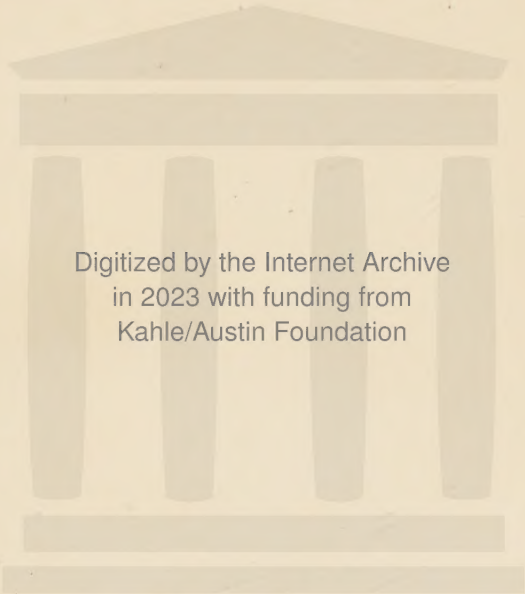
PERCIVAL AT PLAY

ANTHONY ARMSTRONG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PERCIVAL AT PLAY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

HUMOUR

WARRIORS AT EASE
WARRIORS STILL AT EASE
PERCIVAL AND I
HOW TO DO IT
PATRICK UNDERGRADUATE
PATRICK ENGAGED
PATRICK HELPS

CRIME

THE TRAIL OF FEAR
THE SECRET TRAIL

PERCIVAL AT PLAY

BY

ANTHONY ARMSTRONG

("A.A." of *Punch*)

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A. A.

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PERCIVAL AT PLAY

INSULARS ABROAD AGAIN

I. *LE SQUARE*

THE Insulars Abroad are in action again, and Percival and I have at any rate done the graceful thing. The *entente cordiale* has been strengthened and the 'Hands Across the Channel' movement has received some much-needed encouragement. Frances, however, says that as usual we have simply made fools of ourselves again; but then you know what women are. They have no finer perception of the things that really count.

It happened while the three of us were travelling from Calais *en route* to Paris. Percival was deep in an exciting detective novel which we had insisted on his taking—to prevent him mistakenly discussing French politics in French with English fellow-travellers—when our train stopped at Abbéville Station. On that particular portion of Abbéville Station which came opposite our particular portion of train I saw a notice board. I at at once roused Percival from his book and pointed it out to him. It read:

SQUARE
AT THE DISPOSITION OF
MM. LES VOYAGEURS

Behind the board was a small white paling enclosing an exiguous patch of grass which had obviously passed an unhappy and thwarted

childhood. At either end was placed a dejected bench. There was also what looked very like a gravel path. The whole thing was about the size of a suburban front garden, and the idea of it obviously was that those electing to descend during the halt might have a pleasanter place for a short stroll than the station platform.

Seen from a warm compartment on a February afternoon, it looked particularly uninviting; but it was the underlying intention which attracted both me and Percival. We saw its significance and we thought of the zealous and conscientious stationmaster racking his brains to achieve some little civility for his temporary guests. We thought of his sudden flash of inspiration as he conceived the idea of something really English, '*Un square pour la promenade*'. We thought of his pride in an adjunct so much more aesthetic than a *salle d'attente*, so much more spiritual than a *buffet*. And then we thought, with a lump in the throat, of the poor man's growing disappointment and chagrin as train after train from England, the home of the Square, came in, paused unheeding, and went its way.

Percival and I looked at each other and simultaneously rose from our seats. We at least would bring a ray of light into the poor man's life. We were *MM. les Voyageurs*. *Le Square* was at our disposition during the ten minutes or so of *arrêt*. We would use it for him.

Followed by protests from Frances we descended. Together, stern-faced, heads high, a nonchalant word upon our lips, we entered *Le Square*.

I don't think anyone had ever entered *Le Square* before in all its history, for the sensation we caused was terrific. A row of heads at once appeared on the side of the train like peas in a pod. Porters clutched each other and stared incredulously. A ticket collector dropped his collected tickets and shouted joyfully for the stationmaster. I even saw a retired British colonel in a first-class smoker momentarily glance up from the *Morning Post*.

Percival and I, affecting not to notice, strolled once round *Le Square*, stepped twice across it, and then sat down on the northern bench and started a conversation about Leicester Square, Trafalgar Square, and other Squares we had known.

Soon the stationmaster came up at an incredulous double, followed by a posse of porters.

'*Bonjour, messieurs,*' he began, when he had found his breath and his voice.

'*Bonjour,*' we replied graciously and moved round to the southern bench, whence, I think, one procured a better vista.

'*Qu'est-ce-que vous faites là, messieurs ?*'

'*Nous nous amusons dans votre beau Square,*' I said gravely, and added : '*Quel beau panorama ?*' with all the rapture of one who for the first time surveys the Côte d'Azur from the Grande Corniche.

A few of the French onlookers raised a cheer at this, and the stationmaster acknowledged it with simple courtesy by turning round and taking his hat off.

'*Vous vous trouvez bien là ?*' he then inquired

anxiously, as though about to ask us to sign the Visitors' Book.

We said we found both ourselves and each other very nicely, thank you, and ventured that it was surprising to us that *Le Square* was not more crowded, seeing what a so magnificent idea it was to have one there, by example.

The stationmaster was too delighted with this for anything. He beamed all over yesterday's shave. Then suddenly his eyes grew moist. We were now confirmed in our supposition that the conception and laying out of *Le Square* had been a venture of his hot youth, an expression of Abbévillian pride in himself and his station, which, alas, had been slowly withered by the neglect of successive train-loads of unimaginative English, till this day when Percival and I had restored his faith in his earlier ideals.

'*Ah, messieurs!*' he began with feeling, and then in a flood of almost unintelligible French his emotion found vent. He entered by the gate to shake hands with us. He drove back with ignominy a sacrilegious porter who had dared to follow. He picked up a match which Percival, careless lad, had dropped on the grass. He asked us to come to the buffet and have one with him. At least that's what Percival thought he said. My own impression was he wanted us to go to his office and see the special top-dressing he had used for the grass.

Percival said he was sorry but he had a train to catch. The stationmaster appeared to wave this aside. It was nothing. What was one train

between friends! He had hundreds at his station every day and could pick Percival a good one whenever he liked. In fact, I think he offered to stand Percival any train he cared to mention. If, however, Percival insisted on having this one, well, no doubt one could arrange it. He jerked a word over his shoulder to the guard.

The guard, however, a native of a terminus like Paris, had evidently no use for civic pride as displayed by a stationmaster of Abbéville, a town of only ten minutes' halt. He blew his whistle.

I had been anticipating this and ran. Percival, to whom the stationmaster had now taken a terrific fancy, had to stop and shake hands and could not get away so quickly.

I just caught our carriage and clambered in. Percival did not. I told Frances that Percival was busy shaking hands at Abbéville and would probably come on later by a special train. Frances, who prides herself on her presence of mind, threw out his book on to the platform to while away the time for him, and we sat in thoughtful gloom till Amiens was reached.

At Amiens, Percival reappeared, explaining rather diffidently that he had managed to get in at the very end of the train, but on his passage back to our compartment had had to pass through the restaurant car and had been delayed.

Between Amiens and Paris he spent the time wondering what had become of his book. Frances, in cowardly fashion, helped him look for it.

II. TEACHING FRANCES

'NOW you're in Paris,' we warned Frances, as we took a table outside the Café de la Paix, 'you must beware of the street-hawkers, or you'll get badly had.'

'Right-ho!' agreed Frances amiably, as we ordered *apéritifs* from the waiter. Percival and I were by way of showing the child round and making her a girl of the world, and so on, for she had never been to France before. In fact, until I told her otherwise, she had a maternal idea that an *apéritif* was something between an aperient and a purgative.

'How exciting! What's this?' she said a moment later, putting her hand out to a grubby envelope which a mystery-man had laid suddenly and silently on the table.

'Don't touch it!' hissed Percival.

'Oo! Will it explode! He did look rather like a Nihilist.'

'He isn't,' I said. 'He's just a—well, he puts that there and then he . . .'

'But what's inside it? Details of an international plot, or advices from the East, or what?'

'Nothing so romantic, my dear. If you look you'll see that every one else has one too. Inside is a poem—a very bad poem—written by an unemployed. If you open it you must pay him—presumably for having let your feminine instinct of curiosity have a trial run. If you don't open

it . . .' There was a flicker and the mystery-man had appeared, reabsorbed his untouched document, and vanished again into the night. . . . 'Well, you see,' I finished.

'I see,' said Frances, sipping her mixed vermouth, while I wondered to myself why a man who could pick up an envelope from a café table as swiftly and unostentatiously as all that didn't use his gift to snoop something better worth while, say Percival's drink.

At this point a sort of large Arab, completely hung over with carpets, suddenly materialized in front of us, intercepting our view of Paris. Now, though Algiers is pseudo-Parisian, a pseudo-Algerian is by no means Paris ; so we were about to snap a refusal at the creature when Frances weakly said : 'Don't be harsh on him ; he's rather picturesque ! '

That, you see, is what comes of not having been to Paris before. Percival and I looked at one another and nodded grimly. Then for the girl's sake we tried to tolerate the excrescence, who with a happy grin began to display his carpets. When after a while he had unfolded so many carpets that he had obscured even our view of the taxi-accidents, I decided I had had enough and waved him away. Too late ; he merely gazed ingratiatingly at Frances and stood his ground. So Percival waved him away, but he still did not move an inch. He was very permanent ; nothing short of an aeroplane propeller could have waved him away with any success.

Next we tried to fix him with the steady human

eye, but soon found this impossible as he himself possessed a ninety-degree squint, one evil orb aspiring to heaven, while the other was on our pockets. Moreover, he had a bleached khaki face, covered with scars, and four ebony teeth. In short, he was the ugliest bit of creation we had ever seen. Even Frances, who is the soul of charity, referred later to him as 'distressingly plain'.

The situation had thus become rather awkward for us, particularly as Frances was now showing a distinct disposition to laugh, and was murmuring something about bewaring of street-hawkers or we'd be had. So we tried simply to ignore Mohammed ben Ali, or whatever his name was. It is, however, difficult to ignore an Algerian half-caste in a filthy *burnous*, holding thirty-horse-power carpets two feet from you. Eventually, in order to preserve my dwindling dignity in Frances's eye, I reluctantly decided that we should go.

I signalled this to Percival over a corner of foul carpet, and then, with an air of the man-about-town bored by sitting too long at one table, I looked round, caught the waiter's eye, and as he approached, nonchalantly laid a fifty-franc note upon the table. This, as Percival has several times pointed out and I myself am now willing to admit, was where I made a slight tactical error. The waiter was in reality going to the customer next to us, who had caught his eye first, and before I realized this Mohammed whipped up the note, salaamed with grateful profundity, and laid an offensive carpet on my knee. The carpet was

coloured magenta, white and daffodil yellow, and bore on the white portions guaranteed thumb-marks from every boulevard café between Concorde and République.

I rose, protesting in English, and Mohammed, smiling in kindly fashion, sincerely thanked me in some foreign language. Percival merely laughed bilingually. At once I began a row, somewhat hampered by two Frenchmen of the old school, at the table behind, who were broad-mindedly marking down yet another example of how the wicked Englishman comes over to France and buys up the Frenchman's carpets and other luxuries, lowers the franc, encourages extravagance, and thus helps to tax the *bourgeoise*, break up the Cabinet, and make the Seine overflow.

At this point the waiter dashed up and, seeing it was a good row, took a hand. He turned a yard or two of language upon Mohammed, who flung it back with vigour ; whereupon the waiter let loose some of the most devastating invective I've ever heard. Realizing gratefully that our champion had apparently sized up the whole situation, I drew back loftily and let him fight our battle for us.

Unfortunately he hadn't got the situation quite right after all, because Mohammed, slowly wilting under the fierce denunciation, suddenly gave up the fight, extracted a reluctant five francs change, thrust it into my hand, and retreated. With a charming smile the waiter then turned to me and remarked triumphantly : '*Voilà, monsieur. Il vous trompe, ce malin là.* Forty-fife francs was quite enoff to pay.' Then he patted the yellow

and magenta atrocity and murmured: '*Joli, hein?* . . .'

What really rankles is that for the rest of the day neither Percival nor I could even buy a Metro ticket without Frances murmuring in our ear: 'Be careful, children, now you're in Paris, or you'll get had.'

III. PERCIVAL'S HAT

THIS business began with the blowing off of Percival's hat in the Place de l'Etoile. There are few more unpleasant spots to have one's hat blow off than the Place de l'Etoile. I once knew a man who was practically a champion at having his hat blown off. He had had his hat blown off just before the arrival of the Life Guards in a Coronation procession, and he had had it blown off from the top of the Eiffel Tower and from the *Berengaria* three days out from New York and into the *rose du Barry* vat of a dye-works; but even he shuddered when I once asked him casually if he had ever had his hat blown off in the Place de l'Etoile. Yet Percival did it quite easily.

He was standing by the Avenue de la Grande Armée when his hat abruptly left him, bowled merrily off south-eastwards into the traffic, and collided with a taxi. The taxi was practically undamaged, but the hat was severely shaken. It lay quite still for some while, till a motor-bus stirred it up and sent it off once more, this time to an encounter with a limousine. The limousine also was but slightly affected.

Percival meanwhile, having made a rapid calculation of speed and direction, was trying to get round the outer periphery of the Place in order to cut off his hat before it reached the Champs Elysées, *en route* for the Jardins des Tuileries, the Louvre, and possibly the Gare de Lyon. Naturally

he did not dare venture straight out after it into the great open spaces. It is hazardous to attempt the traffic of the Place de l'Etoile direct at any time ; to do so with one's eyes on a receding hat is simply *felo-de-se*.

After the limousine, the hat appeared to luff up a few points to the wind, and ran strongly on an easterly course at a good rate of knots, till a racing cyclist, with his head down in his front wheel and the rest of him pointing up and back, tried to retrieve it with his foot. Of course he oughtn't really to have attempted it ; no doubt racing, not trick cycling, was his forte. Anyway, he seemed to bear no malice after picking himself up. The hat, now apparently inside out and looking rather dissipated, had meanwhile resumed its triumphant course, and after bouncing off another taxi at last reached the central pavement by the Arc de Triomphe.

Here an altruistic Frenchman took as much trouble over trying to catch it as if it had been his own ; and I am able to speak with certitude on this point, because his own blew off in the attempt. He was immediately replaced in his self-imposed duty to his neighbour by an excitable dog and a municipal sweeper with a broom.

Percival by now had reached the entrance to the Champs Elysées. Here he stood breathlessly, like a diminutive goal-keeper in an outsize goal, waiting for his headgear and shading his eyes with his hand.

The hat, however, never reached him. With

total disregard for the dignity of the law it blew straight at an *agent de police*. The *agent*, with total disregard for the dignity of hats, put a flat and enormous foot upon it with extreme accuracy. He then carried it triumphantly back to where Percival had been but now was not. I thanked him on behalf of Percival, myself, and England, and received it tenderly. It looked like a cross between a *béret* that had had a night out and the thing a *valet de chambre* does polished floors with.

Percival and I having spent ten minutes chasing one another round the Place de l'Etoile, at last established touch; after which we sat in a café and applied first-aid to the hat. No less than three waiters with that peculiar French interest in other people's fortunes, took a hand in this. One brought water and one scrubbed it and one pinned up the ribbon, and at intervals they held it up on a hand and admired its progress with all the air of a milliner displaying the latest model. It at last began to look a little better, but it still might have been anything. The dog and the *agent* had both impressed their personality on it in very permanent fashion.

At this point a hand smote Percival's shoulder and a friend he picked up the other day, a French student named Emile, exquisitely dressed in the latest London fashion, greeted him.

'*Ha, mon vieux! Ça colle?*'

'Bung-oh, old man!' returned Percival, nervously hiding his hat under the table. 'Where are you off to?'

'I go across the road to buy me a new hat,' returned Emile in all innocence. 'You come help me, eh?'

After a searching glance Percival said judicially that he didn't see why he shouldn't, and tried to avoid my amused eye.

We rose and with a nonchalant air Percival drew forth and put on his hat. Two of the waiters raised a little murmur of approbation in the background, but Emile did not notice.

We entered the French hatter's shop opposite and a sort of vicomte came forward and bowed. He started perceptibly at the first sight of Percival's headgear, but otherwise took it bravely. I kept myself in the background near the door behind a large hat-tree in full fruit.

Emile started with both hands and his native tongue to convey an idea of the kind of hat he wanted to buy. The usual sort of scene then ensued, the vicomte bringing out soft hats of every shape and Emile spurning them aside with shrugs of the shoulder. At last the discussion became a trifle acrimonious. They began to interrupt one another's sentences half-way through instead of just before the end. The vicomte produced unexpected hats as if they were epigrams; Emile shrugged them into the limbo of bargain-sale relics. I gathered eventually that Emile the exquisite was demanding a hat in the latest English style; while the vicomte was maintaining that a certain brand of hat under consideration *was* the very latest from London itself.

At this point Emile produced a trump card. He suddenly asked Percival's opinion of the hat offered, and when the vicomte, after a withering glance at Percival, was about to deliver a crushing remark, he said simply :

'*Voyez-vous, mon ami est Anglais ; il connait bien les modes de Londres.*'

It was overwhelming. I have never seen such a change come over anyone as over the vicomte. He closed his mouth and stared incredulously at this representative from the world's leading sartorial city. It was just as though 'Célandine' (*née* Stuggs), *modiste* of Tooting, had discovered in an argument about a frock with Mrs. Smythe of The Laburnums that a real Parisienne was present.

Reverently the vicomte bowed. His assistants gathered round at a respectful distance. Percival's battered tile was now regarded with something akin to awe. And when under Emile's urgent appeals Percival confessed he didn't much like the hat in question, there was obviously no more to be said. Authority had spoken. The vicomte put it back in the box and showed us all out with a crushed air. His hats had ceased to be in the correct English style ; his entire stock had suddenly become *démodé*, at the brief criticism of Percival wearing an abomination which bore traces of every vehicle and person in the Place de l'Etoile. It was a wonderful example of the power of British sartorial prestige.

All things considered, therefore, it was, I think, a great pity that five minutes later, having shaken

off Emile, Percival should have returned brazenly to the vicomte, bought the disparaged French hat, and discarded his own London one in the shop itself with every sign of relief and disdain.

IV. THE COLD CURE

WHEN one went to the Riviera in the old days one expected sunshine. One even came prepared for it with tinted glasses and paper sunshades —though if you knew the ropes you could purchase those necessaries in Nice itself. But nowadays all that is changed. One must bring umbrellas and great-coats, if one wants to enjoy life. Percival didn't—with the result that he caught the world's most high-powered cold.

For the whole of next morning, which was sunny, he walked up and down the Promenade des Anglais sneezing pathetically and thoughtfully and melodramatically, and once aggressively at a gentleman who tried, with some display of sympathy I thought, to sell him a shawl. He shivered in a pointed manner if anyone dared to pass between him and the sun. He complained to me and Frances that he hadn't even brought with him a single priceless bottle of quinine—only he called it 'quiddeed', which made it sound far more valuable.

At last I said: 'Well, go and buy some here!'

Percival sneezed petulantly and said: 'I dode know the Fredch for it.'

I replied: 'Well, that doesn't matter; the French chemist will!'

Percival, after very nearly taking me seriously, retorted bronchially that I was neither helpful nor

funny, and broke a fresh pocket handkerchief at his masthead.

In between Percival's now indignant sneezes, Frances managed to interpolate :

'Why not ask the chemist for a local remedy ? He's sure to have something for a cold.'

Percival would, I think, have sniffed at her suggestion, except that he was doing little else in the ordinary course of events ; so it only needed my advice to him not to risk it to send him off with a determined step in search of the nearest *pharmacien*.

Having carefully selected a '*pharmacie Anglaise* —English spoken', Percival led the way in. Frances and I were in general reserve, our offer of closer support having been waved aside by Percival in a series of lordly sneezes.

He advanced to the counter and faced the French chemist over a chin-high barrier of bottles. The chemist politely faced him back.

'*Bonjour, m'sieu. Vous désirez ?*'

'*Bongjour . . .*' began Percival and suddenly launched a capital sneeze of high gross tonnage. The intervening wall of bottles went down like ninepins, thus breaking down at one swoop, one might say, the barrier between nation and nation. An *entente* thus established, Percival trumpeted across the space thus cleared :

'*Je désire quelque chose pour guérir ung rhube.*'

'*Comment, m'sieu ?*' asked the startled shopkeeper, now coming out cautiously from under the parapet.

'*Ung rhube,*' repeated Percival firmly.

The chemist, still puzzled, just had time to duck again as another terrific sternutatory depression moved rapidly up from Percival's north-east.

'*Comme ça!*' added Percival with some presence of mind.

'*Ah, je comprends, m'sieu. Un rhume.* You 'ave coldinze'ed, is it not?'

'*Vous avez parlé!* Gibbe sobethig for it,' replied Percival, relapsing gratefully into his own language, though I must say that I was beginning to think that his cold had, if anything, improved his French accent.

With a smile the Frenchman dived into a drawer and produced a little box labelled '*Crève-rhume*', or, as we should put it if we said that sort of thing, 'Cold Burster'.

'Zis is good,' he said eagerly. 'All the Niçois use it. It is instantly victorious. It is three francs.'

'How do you take it?' asked Percival suspiciously. 'In water?' he added with a dawning repugnance; for I don't think Percival, the true Englishman abroad, has drunk a mouthful of water since he left Dover.

'*Ah, non!*' The chemist too was visibly shocked. 'You sneef it!'

'Sneef!'

'*Mais, oui.* Sneeeff! Place *une prise* on the back of the hand—then SssnnffFF! So!'

The Frenchman's imitation of a cold-stricken invalid sniffing up a *prise* of '*Crève-rhume*' was almost as good as Percival's sneeze—only with a reverse action.

'But I 'ave here an Eenglish *remédie* at ten francs?' he added as Percival looked doubtful.

Percival, again the true Englishman abroad, instantly ceased to look doubtful and bought the cheaper.

Later on we all sat side by side in chairs on the Promenade and took it in turns to read the instructions of how to take 'Cold Burster'. Apparently Percival had to take a *prise* four times a day, but there was nothing to say what was the standard size of a French *prise*. Frances, who was learning tables at school not so very long ago, said she thought three *prises* made one *poise*, but as she confessed a moment later to being under the impression that a *poise* was either a balance or a kind of feminine green-pea, it didn't get us any further.

At last Percival grew daring and poured a little of the white powder out on the back of his hand.

'Is that too much?' he asked.

'It looks to me about a *prise* and a half,' said Frances promptly, trying to keep up her reputation.

'It isn't too much now,' I added; and I was quite right, for at that moment it was removed *in toto* by a slight wind and deposited on the sleeve of a passing gentleman, who without even a word of acknowledgment took it away with him in the direction of Cannes.

'It's too draughty here,' decided Percival, and we retired to the veranda of an aristocratic café, where Percival put another *prise* of 'Cold Burster' on to the back of his hand.

'Now!' I said.

'Now!' said Frances.

'Now!' said Percival. He sneezed just as he had got within range and the *prise* vanished ubiquitously.

'Did I take it?' asked Percival anxiously, opening his eyes.

'On the contrary,' I murmured.

A head-waiter like a duke came up just as Percival was preparing another, and looked sternly at him. It was an awkward moment. We all suddenly felt guilty of terrible things. Percival, who had just tipped the dose out on his hand, murmured a gay little air and tipped it back again. Frances saved the situation by nonchalantly powdering her nose and murmuring that when one is in Nice one should do as the nice people do. The head-water at last turned his back superciliously on us, and Percival sneezed like the midday gun just behind him, so that he jumped three distinct centimetres. After which we were left in peace.

Percival lost three more *prises* by misadventure or premature dispersal before, amid cries of encouragement and triumph, he at last managed to take one.

There was no doubt about its success. To obviate leakage it had been an oversize *prise*—more of a *surprise*, if you know what I mean. And it simply detonated somewhere in Percival's cranium with alarming effect.

Frances says the stuff must have been camouflaged gunpowder. Percival, when he came to,

accused Frances of substituting a pinch of her face-powder when he wasn't looking.

For myself, I at least see why the stuff was called 'Cold Burster'. It burst a glass on the table in front of me, and it burst the top button of Percival's waistcoat, and it completely burst Percival's cold. It burst it, I should say, at a rough guess, into three equal parts—because to-day Frances and I have one portion each. Percival still retains the third and has now bought a dictionary to find the French for that sovereign remedy 'quiddeed'.

V. THE BATTLE OF *FLEURS*

THE Café-Restaurant des Fleurs lies in the back streets of Nice, where, assuming you so far forget yourself as to leave the neighbourhood of the Promenade des Anglais, you will find quite a lot of French people. It comes as a bit of a shock, I must confess, to discover that there are real French people on the Riviera; but there it is. Percival and I did it the other day, while taking one of his short-cuts; for what is airily termed a short-cut by Percival would be called by anyone else a tour of the neighbourhood complete with inaccurate guide. However, it brought us out at lunch-time opposite the little Café-Restaurant des Fleurs—and not for worlds would I have missed that meal.

We made our normal entry, that is to say, a waiter dashed up saying '*Deux places?*' to me, got a good view of Percival, and continued, 'Zis way, misters!' There is *something* about Percival which—well, I honestly believe that if he and a Frenchman collided in pitch-darkness the Frenchman would say 'Excuse' before Percival could get out a word.

When we had settled down, we looked round the small room, and at once noticed an extremely ancient and stately little lady who was grappling with a plate of fish in the forthright manner of an enthusiastic spillikins player. She was an eccentric client, for she discussed food and politics and

her personal health with whichever of the two waiters happened to pass, first attracting his attention by imperiously pulling his coat-tails and then detaining him at her table by laying her fish-fork on his sleeve. She also conversed casually with every one else in the restaurant, and in general gave us the impression that she regarded the place as her court. We watched her with interest.

Having defeated her fish, Madame Menue—to give her a name—changed her eating spectacles for her reading ones and closely consulted the menu and the plate of a gentleman at the next table but one. Then she called across the room to a total stranger :

' Hé ! Qu'est-ce que vous mangez là ? '

The total stranger, after the apologetic manner of a shy courtier singled out by royalty, stammered that he was eating beef.

' Ah ! ' sighed Madame Menue. ' Beef ! Would that I could choose it too. But my teeth do not march so well as they did and I must have lamb. When one is over seventy, what would you ? ' Her shrewd gaze roamed round her small court and gathered up the glances of respectful interest. . . .

At this point the trouble began. Just when she had us all, so to speak, at her feet, for she was without doubt a wonderful old person, the door swung open and another old lady entered.

The new-comer—Madame Grande, one might well call her—looked equally aged, though in a different way. The years had not shrivelled her, as they had Madame Menue ; they had but more

comfortably upholstered an originally well-planned chassis. She sank into a seat, fanned herself, and looked round in the affable manner of one who is accustomed to admiration.

Even Percival, enmeshed in vermicelli soup, was aware of sudden tension as the two old things gazed across at each other. My previous impression that we were Madame Menue's courtiers was replaced by a feeling that we were now ring-side spectators. And we were. For any disposition to a peaceful arrangement of spheres of influence was swept aside when Madame Grande patted a waiter's arm and told him about her heart ; and conflict was inevitable when, after looking through the menu, she chose *beef*.

This, so to speak, opened Round One of the Battle of *Fleurs*. Madame Grande sensed the hostility and must have realized she was already up on points, for she smiled all over her chins. Shortly, however, she committed a tactical error by mentioning proudly to her waiter and the company in general that she was seventy-one yesterday. Quick as a flash came the counter when Madame Menue remarked to her waiter and the company in general that she was seventy-*two* last month. The round thus finished even.

Round Two opened with a palpable hit by Madame Menue, who had the true fighting spirit ; for when her lamb came she affected to dislike it and changed to beef after all. Madame Grande at once responded by reading all through the wine list *without* spectacles, and having observed her opponent to be drinking water and wine, ordered

for herself a bottle of beer. This, I may say, won Percival to her side at once.

During the next Round there was a rattling interchange of body blows. Madame Menue loudly condemned the beef she had eaten, but gave high praise to a Camembert cheese. Madame Grande thereupon praised the beef and complained in penetrating undertones to her neighbours about the smell of her rival's Camembert. Madame Menue immediately retaliated by informing her supporters that the Camembert was *exquise*, and that *she* at least was still young enough to enjoy a good cheese when she met it. Madame Grande staggered for a moment, but recovered with a fine counter, when she told her waiter to bring Dutch cheese, as despite her age her sense of smell had not yet so deteriorated as to permit of her eating overripe Camembert without knowing it.

This nasty upper-cut rather brought things to a peak of silent hostility. For ten minutes nothing could be heard but the subdued conversation of the spectators, who now were about equally divided into 'Menues' and 'Grandes'. One of the waiters had definitely gone over to Madame Grande; but it was still anyone's game. Then Madame Grande, no doubt feeling overconfident, rashly ordered an orange, whereupon Madame Menue, developing a sense of humour, demanded Brazil nuts *without nut-crackers*.

It was a shrewd thrust. Madame Grande gasped. Pocketing her orange, she called for the bill and made a final effort to win us all over. She checked every item ostentatiously without

her spectacles; then took out a small purse and gave her waiter a twelve per cent tip, exceedingly carefully calculated, still without spectacles.

But Madame Menue at the climax showed herself a real strategist. Demanding shrilly her own *addition*, with one blow she won back the defecting waiter and all her seceding courtiers; for she gave as a tip all her small change, with the invincible remark that she attributed her good eyesight at seventy-two to the fact that she had never bothered to count five-centime pieces in restaurants.

'*Trop de peine*,' she added to Percival, and Percival the polite replied sagely:

'*Ah, comme vrai!*'

VI. PERCIVAL AND THE STOVE

PERCIVAL and I and Frances were lent a flat in Paris for a few days on our way back from the Riviera. It was a typical French flat, that is to say, in the sitting-room there was a large stove, round which the flat had obviously been built, and in a small box on the ground floor there was an Eocene *concierge* over whom, judging from her age and appearance, the whole block of flats had originally been erected.

The owner of the flat being a bachelor, the *concierge* 'did' for him daily, and this 'doing' specifically included the care of the stove, which, like herself, rarely went out, muttered perpetually and was of an incredible antiquity. It was evidently her pet, and she told us all about its workings the first afternoon, though since she suffered from an Aude *patois* and an unfortunate lack of teeth on the O.P. side of her mouth, Frances, who learnt French at school, was the only one who understood anything at all. Through her we gathered that it was the type of stove which burnt for days without attention, but, if it did go out, had to be completely emptied and eviscerated and took several hours of skilled labour together with a pound of red-hot charcoal to get going again. It was, in short, the kind of stove which has made France what she is to-day.

Just before going to bed Percival committed an unpardonable error. Although the stove was

burning well, he stirred it up through the little bars at the bottom. One should never poke French stoves. They are highly temperamental and don't understand. This one immediately sulked, whereupon Percival rashly tickled it up again. When we finally went to bed, it was in a very feeble state of health, with a subnormal temperature, and looked as though it would die in the night.

At an early hour next morning I was conscious of vague noises, which by eight-thirty definitely sounded like some one of uncertain temper adjusting refractory machinery with a wrong-sized spanner. While collecting impressions about this, I dropped off to sleep again. Percival, it subsequently transpired, being made of sterner stuff, actually got up and paddled into the sitting-room to see what it really was.

The silent appearance of Percival in amber and sky pyjamas must have been a bit of a shock to an old *concierge* whose mind was fixed on troublesome stoves. I gather she mistook him at first for some sort of MESSAGE. Percival too was equally surprised. Whatever he had expected to see he was not prepared for an unbelievably witch-like old woman in a purple knitted tam-o'-shanter and a kind of black soutane, crouched in an attitude of worship in front of the stove and enveloped in swirling clouds of dust. As he said afterwards, it quite unnerved him, and momentarily he ascribed the vision to the continuance of one of his more realistic *hors-d'œuvre* dreams.

He managed, however, to stammer out something

like '*Bon matin!*' Whereupon the *concierge* uttered a brief and pungent malediction. Or it may have been a kindly response to his salutation; Percival is not good at the sort of remarks they pass at each other down in Aude.

Feeling that he could hardly return to bed at this juncture without seeming stand-offish, he pointed to the stove and said: '*Il ne marche pas*, then?' In reply the hag merely shook her head vigorously, generously redistributing fresh clouds of dust which had settled in the purple knitted tam-o'-shanter. Percival was thus left uncertain whether her negative was meant to agree with and supplement his remark, or to cancel it out into a positive. And as it was instantly followed by yards of explanatory speech, of which he could barely understand a single inch, he advanced to see for himself.

He says he is not certain how he came to find himself on hands and knees staring into the mystery of the stove side by side with the old woman. Anyhow, there he was. He gazed uncomprehendingly at a last dying gleam in the heart of the creature, and the *concierge* bombarded his left ear with dentally-mutilated Aude dialect, from which Percival vaguely gathered that owing to inexperienced handling last night by fools—he understood that bit quite clearly—the stove had got so low that it could not be resuscitated.

'*Alors*,' said Percival, to show he knew all about these things, 'we must rake it right out and start afresh?'

'*Oui, oui, oui, oui*,' said the old woman shaking

her head. Then she nodded emphatically and said: '*Non! non! non!*' She was by no means an easy person to converse with.

'Come on then, granma,' said Percival, rudely interrupting further torrential speech, and laid hands upon the stove.

'*Chô! Très chô!*' remarked the witch—just too late. She uttered an eldritch chuckle as Percival swore—a chuckle which penetrated through two doors into my dreams and caused me to wake Frances up and ask her what the joke was, thus inaugurating a powerful misunderstanding which lasted till lunch. . . . However.

The hag then got up and went out, evidently in search of further weapons. From a final outpouring of unintelligible instructions Percival, whom she apparently now regarded as a working party in sky and amber direct from heaven, understood he was to get the stove ready against her return.

Anxious to distinguish himself, Percival instantly concentrated on raking out the last dying gleam and emptying the stove ready for relaying and relighting. He was not particularly successful. It is very difficult to rake out the last dying gleam in a French stove. The more he tried the more it retreated into the recesses of interminable fuel descending from above, while ashes settled on the furniture as thick as Herculaneum. For a moment he was tempted to give up, then a wholesome fear that the *concierge* might cast a spell upon him for inefficiency stirred him to final effort—and in desperation the poor boob emptied

a vase full of water into the heart of the animal.

There was a loud report; steam and ashes mingled in immoderate quantities; Percival's pyjamas changed magically from sky and amber to navy and brown. In the middle of it appeared the witch-like form of the *concierge*.

She peered at the stove and rapidly emitted metre after metre of what was now quite unmistakable invective. Seizing his opportunity during a brief *entr'acte*, Percival made for the door and went back to bed, where he stayed all the morning.

Wisely too; for not only was it the warmest part of the flat, but he was out of the way of the *concierge*, and from her Frances has just elicited, after half an hour's patient excavation, that she had found the stove completely out at seven a.m., and that what Percival had later taken for a last dying gleam was really a first tender glow, the result of an hour and a half's labour!

INNOCENTS AT HOME

I. WE START ON *LA TOUR*

AS Insulars Abroad, you may remember, Percival and I did Italy and France fairly thoroughly.[1] By France, of course, I mean Paris and the Riviera. But the trouble about all sight-seeing is that it always *is* done abroad. At home in England we never enter a Place of Interest except by accident—and then the guide is talking about it in Lithuanian or American.

So we decided the other day we must rectify this, and we had a brain-wave. We would do it, quite naturally, as foreigners. We had seen Paris through English eyes; we would see London through French ones. In a word, the Insulars Abroad were to become Innocents at Home.

An inquiry at the information bureau of the Savoy Hotel revealed that London was full of queer out-of-the-way places like the British Museum and the Houses of Parliament that we, as true Londoners, had often heard of but had never visited. We determined to start with the Tower of London, and set out to procure guide-books, foreign-looking clothes, and copies of *Anglais en Six Leçons pour le Voyageur*.

Percival had a hat, bought in Paris, which was a disguise in itself. There is something about a

[1] *Percival and I* (Methuen), 3*s*. 6*d*.

French hat which attracts attention anywhere. Whether it is the too large brim or the too small top, or the little metal clip they put in to hold the dent in place and which catches in your hair and plucks out a bunch when you raise your hat, I can't say. But Percival had only to put it on, and then even if he were smoking a bull-dog pipe and carrying a walking stick and *The Times*, I felt people would have said '*Bon jour*' to him. I armed myself with the phrase-book and practised raising my lid in French in front of the glass. After that, not knowing where the supposed 'Tower of London' might be, we delivered ourselves over to a taxi-driver and set off. *Vive la France!* Henceforward—for the afternoon—our motto would be '*Politesse Oblige!*'

On being decanted somewhere in the East End, we addressed the first man we saw, a rough British working man at work:

'*Pardon, m'sieu,*' we said, 'but vere is ze Tour of London?'

He came out of his rough working trance with a jerk, and at the third repetition informed us briefly that this here was it—this here what he was leaning agin—replugged his face with his pipe and relapsed into work once more. . . .

We entered the Tower by the front door and bought tickets in our best French. Our disguise was good. Nobody suspected we were Londoners and we were allowed to pass unchallenged.

Inside, we were acquired instantly by a Yeoman of the Guard, or 'Beef-eater'. He was a very

young Yeoman—more of a Veal-eater I thought. He looked quite innocent, but little did we suspect what lay behind that imposing uniform. He led us off, talking rapidly.

We had had a stupid idea we were going to drift around where we liked and see the Tower; but this we found was quite wrong. After the first minute we had no more say in the matter of where we should go than a company of infantry has on an Armistice Day march-past. But we were gratified to learn that our Veal-eater had placed us properly on hearing our first spoken word; for, apologizing for his lack of French, he had replied with an address of welcome: 'All you, 'oo come from acrost the Chennel to visit this hancient spot . . .' We raised our hats in answer and murmured: '*Vive la France et vive le franc!*'

He showed us everything, including almost at once that he was the Tower champion in Long-distance Non-stop Talking. We tried every now and then to stem the man, but without success. Our only triumph was at the Beauchamp Tower, where we scored a mystified two-minute silence by pronouncing Beauchamp in French. The Veal-eater looked at us sadly, corrected us with all the care of a nurse explaining something to children, and then slid into the longest sentence I have ever heard. It went on for seventeen and a half minutes by Percival's watch; and it dealt entirely with a gentleman called 'Pore Rawley', who went to America to buy tobacco but completely lost his head. We stood by and interjected at intervals

'*Vraiment!*' and '*Pensez de cela!*' and '*Est-cela ainsi?*' (Percival's idea of 'Is zat so?'), but without effect.

At last we made a determined offensive and producing our dictionaries and phrase-books made him repeat every word over two syllables while we looked it up. This brought him to his knees at last and settled 'Pore Rawley'. He took us away quietly and led us up a flight of dark spiral steps. They were very dark and very spiral. I only twisted my ankle at the top, but Percival stumbled at every other one and barked his shins as well. His comments, begun in Anglo-Saxon and translated hurriedly into French, reverberated weirdly up and down the narrow stairway like mutterings of bilingual thunder. Arrived at the top he sat down in a vile temper. He seemed to think the steps were very poorly made and, while the Veal-eater drew breath for further effort, examined his legs and commented to me in an undertone on the cheap workmanship of the Tower staircases. He was just cooling off when the Veal-eater started once more. He began: 'Them steps is called Norman trip steps and is made with unequal steps so as to confuse attackers and prevent them being carried by swift assault.' He paused, looked at Percival and added innocently: 'You gemmen may not 'ave noticed this. . . .'

I was just able to stop Percival in time from saying what he felt in good Anglo-Saxon; and as he did not know enough French to do the matter justice he merely sat there like a corked-up volcano while the Veal-eater droned on. Owing

to our preoccupation he beat his previous record easily, and, moreover, disclosed an unexpected ability to walk backwards and talk at the same time. This I hardly consider fair. We limped after him saying '*Mon Dieu!*' when he was listening and 'Damn the man!' when he wasn't.

Half an hour later two weary people, dressed so nicely in French and thinking so horribly in English, were allowed to tip and depart at the gate.

As we passed out of earshot we heard our Veal-eater remark to a friend: 'Couple of blooming Froggies, Bill! Couldn't talk much to 'em!'

II. THE BRITISH MUSEUM

AFTER the experience at the Tower, Percival and I felt a little discouraged about our idea of seeing how London looked through foreign eyes, but we determined to persevere. That's us all over, the bulldog breed.

'I don't feel keen on doing anything more *à la française*,' remarked Percival. 'It's too exhausting. What about being Rumanians? If we tried to look like royalty incognito we might make some money out of the job.'

I vetoed this, and then had a brain-wave. 'Let's be Italians!' I cried.

'Can't speak Italian!'

'No, but we can speak Latin, and that's the same brand. Merely an older vintage.'

Percival's face brightened and he rapidly declined '*mensa*—a table' with only two mistakes.

'Yes,' he said at last, 'I'm all right. Or is it *mensibus*? What place shall we visit? Soho? Saffron Hill?' he suggested, showing singular lack of perception.

We decided eventually on the British Museum as being safer. Real Italians do not inhabit the British Museum in great numbers.

The following afternoon two Italians might have been seen approaching the façade of the British Museum. Both wore black velour hats, had not shaved, and were declining '*murus*—a wall' antiphonally. They carried Italian phrase-books,

heavy sticks, and even had black shirts : altogether a triumph of amateur dramatic art.

Our first encounter was with an official just inside the door. I glanced at my phrase-book as though reading from it and said :

'*Ees dees-a Museo Britannico ?*'

'Ernh ?' said the man, a trifle startled.

'*Museus ?*' put in Percival.

'Whassay ?' went the man again.

'*Muscus, muse-e, museum,*' went Percival back at him with some resourcefulness. '*Musei, museo, museo ?* Er—*Britannico ?*'

'No, this is the British Museum, gents !' announced the official, equal to anything. We thanked him ('*gratia, gratia, gratiam*'), took our hats off reverently, and passed farther in. He watched us with interest. Apparently he thought we believed it to be a cathedral.

Our next skirmish was with an attendant who tried to induce us to part with our sticks. Now we have never yet succeeded in smuggling our sticks into the Museum, though we still try. But as Italians we hoped we might be at last successful. Every one who has been to Italy knows that no loyal Italian can feel really loyal unless he has a big, knobby stick. Without it he is lost ; he can hardly express even the most lukewarm patriotism.

So, having agreed on our action beforehand, we clutched our sticks manfully and hissed '*Fascisti ! Fascisti !*' meanwhile tapping our chests. The man drew back out of range—Percival has a very powerful '*Fascisti !*' delivery—but repeated : 'All sticks to be 'anded in.'

'No! no! no!' we cried in unison. '*Viva Il Duce!*' At which we both stood to attention and saluted very reverently.

''Ere! Lem*me*,' said another official at this point, pushing up to us. 'Furriners! *I* know how to talk to 'em.'

We waited, not without apprehension of a probable flood of Italian. But the fellow merely said very clearly and distinctly:

'Nothing—to—pay.'

Of course if we had been real foreigners this would have been a nasty one. While we were wondering what to make of it, the fellow gently took our sticks out of our hands, patted Percival on the shoulder, and said comfortingly to me: 'That's all right, Antonio! You'll *'ave* 'em back!'

It appeared we had lost again. After that there seemed nothing more to do about it, so jabbering Ancient Italian we started on our sightseeing by burrowing into a crowd which had collected to hear a lecture on Ancient Egypt.

Our presence in the audience was really hardly fair on the lecturer. We were evidently so much more entertaining than he was. Those near by instantly faced towards us and formed an in-gazing, open-mouthed circle of which we were the centre. Those farther off stood on tiptoe. That's what I like about a British crowd: they always make the foreigner feel at his ease.

Amongst our admirers was one little man in particular who must have been a 'Friend of Italy', he seemed so impressed by us. He watched Percival's every action and listened to my every

word—mostly excerpts from the Fifth Book of the Aeneid, of which I once had to write out long portions for translating *incautus* as 'uncaught'. We began to play up to him, and when during the passing of our lecturer across the path of another we found ourselves hitched on to the wrong star, listening now to a talk on Roman Emperors, he was still with us, still gazing in admiration.

We grew very full of ourselves, and looking about for further conquests we found, wedged close to us, a group of American students. We knew they were Americans because they all had large travellers' diaries with headed pages, of a type that only the States could produce. You know: '*Time*—3.30 p.m. *Place*—British Museum, Lon. Eng. *Weather*—British'; and in a column described as '*What I Think*' they were taking down word for word the lecturer's remarks with the utmost intensity.

'*Americani!*' I murmured loudly to Percival. A pair of horn-rims instantly turned on us and a disdainful Nordic voice said: 'Gee, Sheff! A coupla wops! Say, where's Mussolini?'

It was a triumph for our disguise, even though it was an insult for us, if you see what I mean. Percival, however, was equal to it. Fixing the young man with his eye he drawled in his best Yankee twang:

'*Dic, hospes, nonne novisti Caesarem hibernavisse?*' ('Say, stranger, didn't you know Mussolini's gone to the Riviera?').

Then we hurriedly moved off, murmuring

'*Venimus, vidimus, vicimus,*' to ourselves. Our retirement was impressive enough because we took an interested section of the crowd with us, headed by our little man, still worshipping.

His faithful admiration touched us and we decided to give him his money's worth. We felt he'd be only too delighted to tell the wife that evening that he'd been showing two Italians round the Museum.

So, followed by our crowd, we crossed the hall and stopped by a case of illuminated manuscripts. Placing ourselves next him we began to make excited little comments at a manuscript in front of us.

'*Marveloso,*' declared Percival in ecstasy. '*Balbus macaronum masticabat. Cum difficultate. Molto indigestio!*'

'*Si, si, si, si,*' I agreed, soda-water-bottle-wise. '*Hostes jecerunt multa tela.*'

The little man regarded us with increasing pleasure. He almost looked as though he had at last determined to learn Italian. I smiled politely and turned to him.

'Pardon, *signor,*' I said laboriously, 'but zis book look-a bootiful!' I indicated the manuscript.

'It is,' agreed the little man, whereupon Percival took his hat off and said very rapidly to me:

'*Inde toro pater Aeneas sie orsus ab alto.*'

It sounded so good that I felt it oughtn't to be wasted, so I said:

'*Si, si, si, Luigi, mio,*' and added to the man: 'My fren' 'e ask-a what it ees, da book?'

The other looked at us, then he looked at the book, then at the surrounding crowd, then at us again. Finally he remarked severely:

'It is a fifteenth-century missal; written in—er—Latin! Can I translate any of it for you?'

We were well out into Bloomsbury, I think, before he had finished telling our crowd some silly little joke or other, which they all considered rather good.

Next day two Englishmen called at the cloak-room for a couple of Italian sticks.

III. THE NATIONAL GALLERY

THE meeting with the party of Americans at the British Museum had given Percival and me a new idea for our plan of seeing London through foreign eyes. This time we would be Americans. Percival pointed out that we would have to be careful, because in London we should constantly be meeting real Americans, which might lead to complications. I reassured him, however, by explaining that as our impersonation would of necessity be founded on our conception of the Yank from the pictures and magazines, we should run little risk of confusion, or even recognition, in the presence of any real Transatlanteans.

We had some discussion about dress. Percival, who visits very lowbrow picture-houses indeed, was for getting a sombrero, spurs with rowels like circular saws, and hearthrugs on the legs, and then appearing very suddenly with a white horse at Waterloo Station. But I pointed out that that sort of thing, besides encouraging false hero-worship among British flappers, would probably land him in for a reception by the civic authorities. Percival thereupon shuddered and withdrew his suggestion. We decided eventually (modelling ourselves on something we had once seen ' taking in ' Buckingham Palace in fifty seconds) to wear Norfolk jackets, white linen breeches, golf stockings, shoes, bearing the appearance of having been

built at Barrow, horn-rimmed spectacles, and hats like—well, something between a—well, you must know the sort of hat. As a final touch of verisimilitude, we left our coat-hangers inside our jackets when we put them on.

We were feeling a little shy as we got out of our taxi at Trafalgar Square, which place we had decided was a good central point for seeing England through foreign horn-rims. The first thing we learnt was that, in our new guise of Americans, we were expected to tip the taxi-driver twice as much as we usually did as Britons. It was the taxi-driver himself who told us this. He was a friendly man with an expressive face.

In the portico of the National Gallery, whither we soon retired to escape the crowd of small boys, we came upon a guide trying to get off with a party of open-mouthed provincials.

'Now, ladies and gentlemen,' he was saying, 'can I show you the sights of the Metropolis. In front of you is the world-famous Trafalgar Square, with which its column commemorates the never-to-be-forgotten victory of England's maritime saviour Nelson. I mention in passing that one-way traffic is now compulsory in this square. Beyond is Whitehall, where Charles I met his doom at the hands of the . . .'

The provincials shut their mouths with a jerk, as they realized, first, that they were being addressed and, secondly, that they might be expected to pay for it, and moved off hurriedly into the building ('Admission Free This Day'). The guide at once transferred his attention to us.

Glancing at our clothes as he approached he began again with some versatility :

' Now, sirs, can I show you the capital town of li'l' ole England. This is Trafalgar Square, one of the busiest traffic centers of London. Several thousand vehicles pass here every day. It contains a column one hundred and forty-two feet high. In Whitehall beyond King Charles was beheaded on January 30th 1649. . . .'

We too moved off, but with a new feeling of pride in our disguise. From the guide's altered remarks it was evidently good.

There was soon no doubt about this, for as we passed the turnstile a man sold me a catalogue, a thing I rarely allow to happen to me when in normal dress, and told Percival that if he went straight through the room to the right he would see the Raphael that cost over seventy thousand pounds. I managed to get even with the fellow by asking quickly what that was in dollars. He didn't know. Nor for that matter did I—at least not until I had retired into a corner and done a little heavy work with a pencil and the back of an envelope.

We did the gallery in twenty-one minutes. That is not bad time for the whole course, and Percival, I should say, holds the record for the Umbrian school. He beat me there by over ten seconds, and by five in the Dutch school, where I slipped on a grating. In the Venetian school, however, he stopped, despite my warnings, to look at a picture ; but then he had rubbers on his shoes and could afford to loiter. We marked our

various times up on the score card for each school and totalled up at the end. Owing to his Umbrian time Percival beat me easily, so I shall demand a bisque for the return match at the Tate.

Before we left finally I gave the cloak-room attendant a black and green cigar from my top waistcoat pocket, where I had four of them held in position by fountain-pen clips.

Then, well pleased with our morning's work, we adjourned to a neighbouring hotel bar to talk about Prohibition. In the middle of our first sarsaparilla a young man rushed at Percival and shook him warmly by the tumbler.

'Gee—if this ain't luck! Why, bo', you remember me, don't you?—Eddie B. Western, out in Philadelphia, wasn't it? Say, you remember that night we had together in that dive off Ludlow Street? Say, I never could remember your name, but ain't it lucky I met you? I've been saying to myself if ever I met that nice young fellow—and I'm gosh darned if I don't forget his name—I'll stand him a drink. Jes' give it a name now!'

Percival, who had been about to deny all knowledge of his newly-made and exuberant friend, saw a free drink coming and delayed action.

'He thinks I'm some friend of his,' he explained to me in a whisper, while the man from Philadelphia who loved Percival like a brother hailed the bar-tender.

'Exactly,' I said, and waited for something further.

'Gee, if that ain't silly, if my man hasn't sent

me out without my wad! Say—here's my card —you know me; perhaps you'll lend me a fiver, till . . .'

I had not waited in vain. I smiled pleasantly on him and spoke English:

'Nothing doing, old horse.'

To which he replied: 'Well, there was no harm in trying. But, hell! Are you English?'

'We are,' I said as I took Percival away before the poor boob could generously hand over his wad, roll, or purse. 'Good-bye.'

But in a way you know it was the best compliment to our disguise that we had yet received.

IV. *RUS IN URBE*

I HAVE already told you that, while we were seeing the National Gallery through American horn-rims, we met a party of provincials ' oop for t' daay '. Well, that gave us a fresh idea. We decided that we too would see London as the country cousin sees it. I mean, of course, the real country cousin ; not the kind that periodically pays a three days' visit simply in order to hit the giddy Metrop such a crack that the night-clubs are quite impossible for respectable people any time after two a.m.

So one morning behold Percival and me at Paddington Station — ' just coom oop vrom Zummerzet ', or, rather, from Loamshire—and with our mouths already wide open. I wore a very Norfolk jacket and cord breeches, of such a cord that one could strike safety matches on the seat. Percival, who does things perhaps a trifle too thoroughly, wore the same, but in addition sported gaiters made, I should say, of rhinoceros hide, and three straws in his hair under a very furry hat something like a pudding basin with mudguards at front and rear. In short he looked good.

' Eh, ba goom, lad, thikky's girt Lunnon town, sure-lie, howsumever,' began Percival, touching in one sentence more counties than ' girt Lunnon ' even has.

I at once restrained the man—one can overdo

these things—and asked a passer-by to direct us to Hyde Park, which seemed a good, though perhaps risky, place to begin upon. He obliged —in a strong Welsh accent—and in a few minutes we found ourselves at the Marble Arch.

Here, gazing about us, we soon found—fastened to the railings—a metal plate which read :

> *'The triangular stone in the roadway sixty-nine feet north of this point indicates the site of the ancient gallows known as Tyburn Tree.'*

'Tyburn tree an' all,' said Percival in enthusiastic Loamshire, adding in surprised Middlesex that although he passed that corner three times a week he had never seen the plate before. I pointed out that, being a Londoner really, his ignorance was quite natural, and he should console himself with his knowledge of the true site of the old Guillotine in Paris, unknown of course to many Parisians. After which we stepped out to view the triangular stone in the roadway.

'Eh, bor,' began Percival lyrically, 'what a mort o' poor laads must have lost their lives at this spot. . . .'

A policeman, coming up at the double, just prevented one more life—Percival's—being lost at that spot : this time through the medium of a Number 16 bus instead of the hangman's rope.

We were carefully escorted to the pavement and told to keep on it till we left London. This left us free to visit the Park, and once inside we agreed that we would not speak to anyone unless spoken

to first, in order to see exactly what did happen to William and Jarge when up in that there Lunnon. So we began to walk slowly southwards, looking I must say rather a gift.

The first person to mark us down was a small boy, who, starting with a request for cigarette-pictures, put up an ingenious demand for two half-pennies for a penny, which latter he subsequently failed to find. I think the reason he gave was that it had slipped through a hole in his pocket; but whatever it was, Percival of course fell for it.

No sooner had he left than another youngster came up, and after asking for the right time, please, inquired if we knew of a place where one could buy sweets, as he wished to give his baby brother a present. Percival again played the part assigned him.

The next boy was slightly older, but less cunning. Or perhaps, seeing our clothes, he did not think us worth any higher strategy. He merely pointed out with great affability that my boot-lace had come undone and then remarked that, strangely enough, to-day was his birthday. Percival was struck by the coincidence and wanted to signalize it. But I stopped him; for I could see a kindly old gentleman with white hair awaiting his turn in the unobtrusive queue that was now following us.

This old man was obviously out for big business. He began on the subject of the sheep grazing nearby in the Park, as being likely to interest us. He talked learnedly about Suffolks and Dorsets, and Percival equally learnedly said: 'Iss fai',

sure-lie. Them're gude uns vor wool.' The old gentleman then talked about Black Faces and Lonks, and Percival, still competing well, said that Black Faces were an open book to him and that he came from Lonkshire. With a reassuring glance at Percival's leggings the white-haired old sinner next hailed a taxi and invited us to drive round London with him and see the sights.

The drive was well worth it: our guide was exceedingly widely informed. He showed us a London such as we had never seen before. He pointed out Marble Arch at Hyde Park Corner and St. Paul's at Westminster, and, spreading himself slightly, the Army and Navy Stores at Wellington Barracks, with the employees arriving in uniform. The Houses of Parliament he kept in their correct site, but he named several of the men just then knocking off for the dinner-hour from their work on the fabric restoration as prominent labour members coming out after an all-night sitting. Mr. J. H. Thomas in particular I noticed in well-cut corduroys and a dress neckerchief; while Mr. Scrymgeour carried a bottle in his coat pocket.

Having seen us apparently swallow all this, he no doubt decided he might reasonably conduct an offensive. He dismissed the taxi, Percival of course paying, and began a long story about a friend of his in Spain whom he hadn't seen for years and who had just died leaving a curious bequest in his will. In fact, it was something to do with treasure. . . .

Percival was getting quite excited about it when

I determined to intervene. Percival is wasted where he is ; I feel somehow he ought to live in a vicarage and buy oil-plots in Texas. I was just about to forestall our friend by asking him very politely whether he would let me hold his pocket-book for him as a mark of faith, when a man passing by stopped and said to us in a broad country accent :

' Doan't 'ee have naught to do with un, mister ! 'E be what they call a confidence tricker, 'e be. I know un ! '

He then passed on, and so did the white-haired old man, but in the opposite direction. We were so shaken that even Percival said, ' Thanks frightfully, old man ! ' in his best B.B.C. Oxford. And not the least annoying thing about it was that this genuine countryman was dressed in an ordinary lounge suit without even a single whiff of stable.

V. *RURITANIA IN URBE*

OUR latest effort at seeing the Metropolis through foreign eyes has been to do it as two Ruritanian men of letters, travelling incognito —that is, as far as it is possible for any man of letters to travel incognito. Of course neither Percival nor I could speak a word of Ruritanian, but we did not let that worry us. The great point was that nobody else could either ; and so, on the principle which enables one to talk impressively on Modern French Art when in a gathering of English stockbrokers and equally impressively on Weak Bulls in the London Oil Market when in a gathering of Modern French artists, we both spoke Ruritanian with ease. True, it had a suspicious resemblance to those tags of ancient Greek which the gradual leakage of a Classical Education from the youthful brain leaves lying about in odd corners of the memory ; but then Ruritanian is like that. At any rate, you may correct me if I'm wrong.

The question of dress gave us a little more trouble. Percival's first effort was to turn up in a brown linen plus-four suit with a white bib collar and black gloves, which shook me considerably. I thought the poor lad had gone quite boobah or something, till I discovered he had merely misunderstood me and thought I said '*Puritan*'.

He then went away with a copy of *The Prisoner of Zenda* in his hand and reappeared later with a floppy hat and a pair of those boots which hang

down over the ankles like a half-peeled banana and look as though they ought to be worn with sock-suspenders. He remarked in self-defence that even foreigners of European extraction dressed very queerly, and that it was lucky for us Ruritania was not in Asia or Africa ; and the words were scarcely out of his mouth when we looked out of the window and saw two negroes from the Jubwahili hinterland and a Chinaman from Long-Toe-Shoo, all dressed in immaculate Savile Row suitings. That decided us. We put on our own immaculate Tottenham Court Road suitings and sallied forth.

The part of London we had determined that two Ruritanian men of letters ought to see was Hampstead. There are a lot of questions of the day in which two Ruritanian men of letters might interest themselves in Hampstead—such as how long the Bank Holiday paper remains on the Heath despite the attacks of three men with pointed sticks, and how long Georgian houses remain in Downshire Hill despite the attacks of Sunday bus services. But I regret to say that the two Ruritanian men of letters never got to Hampstead at all. All that actually happened was this :

Rudolph Apple and Percival of Hentzau began by writing out HAMSTED on a bit of paper and showing it to people with an inquiring '*Tond apameibominos?*' in best Ruritanian, meaning of course : 'Would you have the goodness to inform us of the best route to the place named in the margin ?'

For half an hour people either laughed, moved away apprehensively, or said they were strangers in those parts. So at last we took it to a policeman.

'*Pose gar ow?*' we asked, putting it more curtly.

He at once took us by the arm and shoved us down the Hampstead, Highgate, City, South London, and Morden Tube.

It was at this point I may say that, artistically, we failed. Had we kept up our Ruritanian pretence we should no doubt, knowing nothing of London, have actually taken a ticket and tried to get to Hampstead on the Hampstead and Highgate Tube (with which, if you will allow me, I will still couple the designations of City and South London, not forgetting the place called Morden somewhere near the Sunny South Coast).

Being, however, Londoners underneath, we knew the thing was impossible in the time at our disposal; for as a general thing on that particular line the trains which stop at the station you want to get in at (either by unanimous decision of the directors or sheer lack of interest on the part of the driver) omit to visit the place you want to go to; whereas the trains which visit the place you want to go to (again either by the unanimous decision of the directors or by sheer forgetfulness on the part of the driver) omit to stop at the station you want to get in at—which makes it dangerous if not impossible to board them. I trust I have made myself clear.

So no sooner had our policeman turned away than we crept out once more in search of a taxi. Unfortunately he turned back again. No doubt

he had thought we looked suspicious. He stood over us and said :

' What's your little game ? '

' *Brekkekekex ?* ' remarked Percival politely.

' Eh ? '

' *Koax ! Koax !* ' I explained.

' *Prossephee glaukōpis, Robertos,* ' finished Percival, to make it quite clear.

' Ah, furriners ! ' spake grey-eyed Robert. ' Well, where do you want to go to ? ' he continued, in the tones of one who isn't going to believe when he does hear.

' Empshtead ! ' answered Percival in broken English with a strong Ruritanian accent, hurriedly writing it out again on a fresh bit of paper, an unexpected down draught from an Edgware through train having removed the first.

' Empshtead ! ' he repeated, and gave it to the policeman. This time from the way he was standing the policeman read

HAMSTED

He was, however, quite equal to it. He nodded sagely, and said ' Ar ! ' and called up a taxi. Then : ' What nationality ? ' he asked.

' Ruritanian ! ' I said in English, to see what would happen. Percival merely repeated ' *Empsh*-tead ' with a stronger accent on the first. He seemed rather pleased with it.

The constable at once put our two remarks together with considerable skill.

' Drive to the Rooritanian Embassy ! ' he said to the taxi-driver.

'*Laan ano ōthesky poti lophon*,' said Percival, climbing in in order to hide his laughter.

'*Ortar epeita pedonde kulindeto laas aneidees*,' I added swiftly.

'Not at all, Oscar,' replied the constable with true politeness, and moved off in a dignified manner.

'Where *is* this blinkin' Embassy?' asked the driver after a minute.

'Oh, go to the Splitz Hotel!' I said, giving the game up. It was not the same thing as Hampstead quite, but I felt we needed a drink. Or, as the Ruritanians say, a '*Krateer*'!

VI. DINING OUT

'NOW, look here,' I said to Percival. 'We have by now seen a good deal of London through foreign eyes—French, Italian, American. Let us this time combine everything and be Men-of-the-world!'

'Good! What shall we do?'

'What else do Men-of-the-world do except dine—artistically and discerningly? Not in the garish temples of food frequented by the common herd, but in some little cosmopolitan place they have discovered where they consult the proprietor before choosing, and where if they complain that there is a trifle too much salt in the *Consomme Réjane* the chef shoots himself in despair.'

Percival has no perception of the finer shades. He merely said: 'Well, I'm all on for a good feed, wherever we go. What about Jimpson's in the Strand?'

'Fool!' I replied. 'I said we will go to . . .'

'Oh, all right, old chap, I heard. But where *is* this place then? The one where there's such high mortality among the cooks?'

'Anywhere *we* choose to discover. But I have here a little book called *Dining Out* by "Connoisseur" of the *Daily Pail*—you know he dined out for them every night for a month all over London to improve the circulation—and he speaks highly of the Restaurant Coccolini in Soho. We will make up like Adolphe Menjou and set off there . . .'

Percival Menjou and Adolphe Apple caused a slight sensation in the Coccolini that night. They had read up the book carefully beforehand and were determined to do the thing in style—just as the writer had done.

'Now, remember,' I said to Percival. 'We understanding men-of-the-world have no truck with mere waiters; we deal only with the manager—er—Signor Cello, most urbane of proprietors, according to the book. . . .'

'Table for two, saire!' interrupted a head-waiter.

'One minute!' I began, quoting from the first paragraph. 'I'd like a discreet corner table for two out of the rush and where one . . .'

'Suttinly, saire!' He plumped us down at a centre table between two hurrying streams of waiters.

'But, look here, I . . .'

'Zis last table. Very full these days. What you like to eat?' He flipped a card in front of us.

We waved it haughtily aside. Evidently he had not read 'Connoisseur'.

'We will discuss our meal with the manager. Ask my friend Signor Cello to come and talk to me!'

'Signor Cello dead two year. You like-a nice *table d'hôte* . . .'

'In that case I won't bother him,' I interrupted stiffly. I could see the dining out was going to be more difficult than I had thought. 'Connoisseur' was a trifle out of date.

'You like-a nice table d'hôte dinner vera good? . . .'

'Ask the present manager to come!'

'Suttinly, saire. Signor Tromboni manager now. . . .'

Signor Tromboni, when he arrived, was busy. There was no doubt of it. His attention was a trifle errant and his forehead a trifle moist. The pleasant discussion of food leading up to the fact that we would order *Filet de Sole Dandolo* and *Poulet Cocculini*, both specialities of the house, didn't seem to take the right turn. He merely suggested the *table d'hôte* dinner was very good, shoved the menu further in front of us and prepared to depart in the direction of the kitchen, where a good south European altercation was evidently in progress.

'We never take the dinner,' we said firmly. 'We are going to design and eat a meal *à la carte*!'

He merely substituted the *carte* for the menu, murmured 'Excuse', and faded out into the back premises. We sighed and continued to read up the book in secret and to wave away waiters, till he returned.

This time Signor Tromboni was a little more affable, having apparently settled without much bloodshed some trifling vendetta in the kitchen. We prepared to design our meal.

'I'm told your *Filet de Sole Dandolo* is very good,' I began.

'It's not on to-day, saire. We must have notice. There are special things to buy for that dish. Leetle things that . . .'

'What? No *Sole Dandolo*?'

'No sole, saire.'

'What about steak and chips?' suggested Percival.

I ignored him. Percival has no soul either.

'Then we must have *Supreme de Barbue*,' I said, consulting the *carte* learnedly, 'followed by your speciality—*Poulet Coccolini*.'

'Alas, monsieur! For the *Poulet Coccolini* I require notice too.'

'We appear to have come on the wrong day for men-of-the-world, old chap,' commented Percival. 'To-morrow would be always better.'

We certainly did seem to be having bad luck. I hurriedly assumed a knowing air and ordered *Poulet Poché au Riz*, trying to look as if it hadn't just caught my eye but had been secretly recommended to me by the secretary of the gourmets' club. This choice Percival, the Philistine, supplemented with some common roast lamb, and Signor Tromboni prefixed with a soup 'while you are waiting—yes.'

Then came the question of wine. And there I knew I had him. For 'Connoisseur' had specially recommended a 1906 Montrachet, No. 70 on the list. So waving aside the documents in the case I said in my most superior manner: 'And we'll drink with it a bottle of your No. 70!'

'A—bottle of 70, monsieur?' he repeated. He appeared not so much awed as surprised.

'That's right!' I said sharply. 'I have heard it well spoken of here. . . .'

He summoned the wine-waiter, passed on our order, and left us abruptly.

We took our soup in an appraising manner and had embarked on the fish when the wine-waiter appeared with a grin and a bottle. He placed it reverently on the table, and Percival sniggered. It was a small bottle of Barclington's beer.

'What in thunder . . .' I began, and then a thought struck me. I verified it from the wine list. Much had changed since Cello's and indeed 'Connoisseur's' day. The Montrachet had been promoted to fifty and the following beverages had moved up in rotation. Indeed, I had only just kept in the ales; a few more gaps in the senior ranks of champagne and I should have been landed with a bottle of cherry brandy.

'Take this away. My error! Of course I meant 50 . . .' I was beginning rapidly, when Percival spoilt it all.

'Not on your life, Mussolini!' he said. 'I *like* beer!'

Percival, I fear, will never make a Man-of-the-world. He is too earthy. He has feet of clay.

Somehow the dinner fell flat after that. It took on altogether a different tone. We ate quickly and paid and went out. It was not till I got outside that I realized we had had, feeding *à la carte*, exactly the same dishes as we should have had if we had had the fixed dinner—with the exception of *hors d'œuvre*. We had, however, paid nearly double.

Discovering this, Percival immediately wanted to go back, secure a refund, or alternatively demand his *hors d'œuvre*, but I dissuaded him.

'To Men-of-the-world,' I said severely, 'a little

money more or less is nothing ; nor do they often partake of *hors d'œuvre* after the coffee. They have *savoir-faire*. . . .'

' Well, let's be ourselves next time,' said Percival morosely, ' and have *savoir-manger* instead.'

PERCIVAL AT PLAY

I. THE SQUEAK

THERE is a Squeak in my car. I noticed it first in Maida Vale, which is not the most likely place for noticing squeaks, but still I did. I noticed it at once and said to Percival who was with me: 'What a row that car in front is making!'

Percival agreed and said it sounded like a sort of a squeak. He added profoundly—to show me, I suppose, that very little was hidden from him in the way of mechanical knowledge—that there was nothing like a drop of oil for any sort of a squeak.

After this the other car drove on ahead but left the Squeak behind. We then attributed it variously to a Number 16 bus, a child's scooter, and the left knee-joint of a very old man on the pavement, till at last it dawned on us that it was emanating from our own car.

'Better stop and trace it, old man!' urged Percival airily. 'It's getting on my nerves. A drop of oil will settle it.'

We stopped the engine and the Squeak stopped. We went on; so did the Squeak. We were not much further forward.

'Well, that proves it's in the engine,' said Percival helpfully and we sat and listened to the Squeak for some while further with rapt Sunday-concert expressions. It was a noise something

between an elementary school child doing a proportion sum with a poor quality slate pencil and an asthmatic Chow dog, winding up for a sneeze. After ten minutes we could hear no other noise at all, and were automatically raising our voices. This is a peculiarity of unauthorized car noises, once you start to listen for them. To our tautened ear-drums there was soon but one single noise in the whole world, and Percival even got to the stage of suggesting, as a Klaxon horn sounded from a car behind us, that it seemed to have changed its note slightly.

Something had to be done about it. We took our car to a quiet street, and I drove it about slowly while Percival hung over the side with the bonnet up and listened. Then I lurched a bit, and he put his hand on a sparking plug to steady himself. It didn't seem to steady him much; in fact, he was very restless for a long while afterwards. After this we changed over—at Percival's request—and he drove, while I leant over the side. I was almost certain I had located it when Percival drove too close to a lamp-post, and I lost it and my hat and my temper all together. We stopped and rested.

'Well, it's in the engine,' repeated Percival eventually. 'That's all we can say.'

'Or the back axle,' I put in. 'It seems to come from behind.'

'It does,' agreed Percival bitterly, 'but it does that whichever way you face. We want skilled help.'

So we took the car and the Squeak to a garage,

where we told a lovely oily man—the Skilled Help—all about it.

'We only want to trace it,' said Percival, as the man placed a casual hand on the cushions of the driving-seat and became less oily. 'Once we've done that a drop of oil will finish it.'

'Ar,' said the Skilled Help.

'It must be in the engine,' continued Percival.

'Ar,' said the Skilled Help.

'Because you can only hear it when the engine is running,' finished Percival.

'Ar,' said the Skilled Help again, and just placed a foot on the running board; whereupon the Squeak instantly broke out once more.

'That it?' queried the Skilled Help.

Percival and I were too overcome at the treachery of our Squeak to answer. All our work gone for nothing.

'Sounds like your ellipticals,' continued the man intimately; 'or maybe a dry shackle.' At least I think that's what he said, but I never was good at anatomy.

He got underneath with an oil-can and poured some on his face and some more on Percival's new brogues. Then he reappeared and placing a heavy foot on the running-board rocked the car to and fro till it wallowed like a three-decker in a heavy swell. The Squeak rose triumphant above the rattling of tools and cans and bottles in the back.

The Skilled Help appeared slightly piqued at this.

'Must be your universal,' he said, and having taken out some floor-boards inside the car, got

at the noise from above with a spanner. He put in five minutes of this and apparently frightened the Squeak out of its hiding-place and away forward under the bonnet.

Here he tried to fix it for a further quarter of an hour. He had some little success. His action changed the note of the Squeak slightly, and it dropped an octave or so. Personally, I think it was ageing under its harsh treatment and its voice was breaking. Anyway it did not now lack for company, because a new sound, like a corncrake with hay fever, had developed near the off wing.

I looked and listened with interest. Percival, after offering to borrow a stethoscope, and then having to explain at length that he was merely being funny, became bored and began to whistle between his teeth. The man, now thoroughly on his mettle, plunged all over the car with every tool he could find. The result was the addition of a surging sound when the engine was started up and a monotonous rattle like a badly fitting skeleton from the region of the tappets.

This made the man quite angry; nor was his fury allayed at all by his suddenly discovering that one of the noises he was under the impression he was chasing was merely Percival whistling between his teeth.

When a subdued humming, like an elderly bumble-bee incarcerated in a match-box of fine acoustic properties, broke out near the fan-belt the man gave up. He weakly said he had no more time, and added that he thought we shouldn't hear any more of the noise now.

Percival paid him for skilled help and got in the car. Then he got out, wiped down his trouser-legs as well as possible, replaced the floor-boards, and got in again.

We drove off. The man was quite right. We couldn't hear the noise any more. As in Kipling's 'Ship that Found Herself' there was one new big voice, compounded of voices from each spring, bolt, and stay in the car, which drowned every individual noise and made even policemen look apprehensively at us. But the Squeak, as a squeak, was gone—lost—submerged. It's wonderful what a little Skilled Help can do.

II. OUR BAD FISH

THE other day, supported by Percival, I made a complaint in a restaurant. It was not a very big complaint, but then it was not a very big restaurant. Of course, there are men who make complaints in big restaurants. Percival knows a fellow who in Berklidges, of all places, can not only complain that the *poulet poché aujourd'hui* is looking a bit *hier*, but can actually ask the head wine-waiter to bring him a fish-fork at once please. And he gets away with it too. The head wine-waiter does bring him a fish-fork, and looks pleased to do it, while from the kitchens is heard a muffled report as the chef responsible for the *poulet* writes a note for the coroner and shoots himself.

But I am not that sort of person. I never make complaints in big restaurants—not even by writing it on the back of my bill and getting out before the manager can read my handwriting. In the first place, I think I am one of those strong men who are born to suffer in silence ; and in the second place, it is no fun in a big restaurant, because they always agree obsequiously with whatever you say.

Well, my complaint in this particular small restaurant was about the fish. It may have been the hot weather, or it may simply have been that the fish had got tired of waiting, but we both had a *faint* suspicion when it was first placed in front of us ; which suspicion, after Percival had looked

very closely and I had blown my nose and tried again, became a certainty. So we called up the waiter.

My original intention had been to say simply: 'Look here, waiter, I don't think this fish is very good; bring me an omelet instead!' And there the incident would have been closed. But you can't do things as simply as that in a small Soho restaurant run by a gentleman of south European extraction. For the proprietor tamely to acquiesce in any complaint is incredibly to admit himself in the wrong. Worse still, it is to forgo the possibility of a delightful argument beneficially stimulating to all concerned.

So that I had barely got out the first half of my remark, before the waiter said in awestruck tones: 'I fetch-a da manager, saire,' and disappeared round a screen. He appeared, I must say, to be divided between eager anticipation of the forthcoming discussion and an evident regret that he would have himself to relinquish future conduct of the affair to his superior.

At the cheering news of an imminent dispute the manager had obviously dropped everything he was doing. He appeared in his shirt-sleeves, beaming with delight.

'There is something bad? Yes? No?' he began, with the air of one offering us choice of weapons. I could see that no matter whether we chose 'Yes' or 'No' he would take up whichever was left.

'This fish,' I began, rather diffidently now, 'is not good!'

'Not at all good,' added Percival, in staunch support.

'Impossible, monsieur; he is bought this morning! Is it not so, Mario?' he said, turning to the waiter at his elbow, who was obviously acting as his second in this affair of culinary honour. Mario at once agreed with as much vigour as if he were taking an oath of allegiance to Mussolini just outside a chemist's shop; and the proprietor turned to me again. It was my move. I conferred a moment with Percival to show I had a second too.

'Even if it were bought ten minutes ago,' I pointed out, 'that is hardly proof . . .'

'Oh, but, monsieur! *Tenez!* One meenit. You see!' He shot off into the kitchen to reappear with a large bowl of small raw fish in the nude—a singularly repulsive sight. 'These are ze same—*absolument.* These *bon*, yes!'

'I think they're *not bon*, and I'd like an omelet!'

'Of course the messieurs can have an omelet instead,' he agreed politely, and shrieked off: '*Deux-omelettes-deux-tou'-suite.*' Having thus courteously disposed of the trimmings round the main theme he reverted: 'But ze feesh?'

'*Pas bon!*'

'Not good, that is,' explained Percival courteously.

'*Comment ça?*'

I gave an expressive sniff in the direction of my plate.

I wished a moment later I hadn't. He instantly dived into the bowl he held, drew out one of the

raw fish therein, sniffed it noisily, shook his head, and passed it over to us.

I declined the gambit. I am not good at this sort of thing in the middle of a meal. Percival got a cigarette ready.

'Nozzing bad—no?' stated the manager, and grabbed another from his bowl. 'Nor zis—yes?' he continued, and began to go through the complete roll of fish on the strength one by one, politely offering us a sniff in each case. 'What is it bad—yes?' he asked at last.

I judged the time had come for frank speaking.

'It smells!' I said plainly, politely, and distinctly, and Percival, who seemed to be getting more of a parrot than a second, repeated my remark.

Our opponent was not annoyed. Far from it. In fact, an ecstatic smile of comprehension suddenly lit up his face.

'Smells! Yes, yes,' he agreed, to my amazement. 'Yes. Smells,' he repeated, to make his meaning clear.

'Well, there you are then,' I repeated. I was quite tired of the argument by now, but glad that I had convinced him, even though he seemed so pleased about it. 'And now we want our omelets,' I concluded.

'Smells,' he repeated joyfully. '*Absolument.*' He held up another, sniffed at it and said '*Bon!*'

Something had evidently gone wrong somewhere. He seemed to have the wrong book of words.

'Smells! Pah!' I said.

'Smells! Yes!' he countered.

We paused, looking at one another. It seemed to be a deadlock. Of course, we had won by making him admit that the fish smelt badly, but the annoying thing was he *would* look as though he considered he had won too. The omelets, however, materialized at that minute, and so we all bowed gracefully and separated. It was not till just as we were going out that a thought struck me.

I looked at the menu again and realized that the fish under discussion had been ' smelts '. I did not, however, reopen the argument. It seemed to me that the proprietor's English was not advanced enough to grasp its finer points.

III. WE COMPLAIN AGAIN

HEARTENED by the nominally successful results of our recent complaint in the Soho restaurant, Percival and I have made another—this time actually at our Club. We say it carelessly, but in reality it was the outcome of two months' deliberation, two months of working ourselves up to a state of indignation which would not be denied.

We had never dared make a complaint before, though we had always longed to. We used enviously to watch old gentlemen sitting near us, complaining of the caviare, or the number of truffles to the cubic inch in the *pâté de foie gras*. And then we used to think mournfully about our tomato salad. There! I've told you. . . .

Tomato Salad in the Club book of words is sixpence, and both Percival and I are very fond of it and regularly order it. We are each brought (*a*) a curved plate, (*b*) salad dressing, and (*c*) a little dish on which are slices of tomato—a salad you observe. *But*, on pushing these slices together with the knife and causing them to reassemble, we invariably find each salad is only—One Medium-sized Tomato.

Now, we have been into the matter. Percival knows that tomatoes are sevenpence a pound, and I know that you get about six tomatoes of varying sizes in the bag. And that is retail price. Therefore at the most one and one-sixth pence was the

cost price of our One Medium-sized Tomato. We had been overcharged by at least four and five-sixth pence, or over three hundred per cent: excessive, we consider, for the use of a curved plate, salad dressing, and unskilled slicing labour.

But we are neither of us, as I said, good at making complaints. We lose our nerve. The first half-dozen times it happened we magnanimously gave the Club the benefit of the doubt. After all, one cannot expect such a big concern to be exact to one tomato, and only one more—or less—would have changed the character of the salad completely. The next time, however, Percival called the waiter up for me, and I asked him quite severely whether he called that a tomato salad. He said yes, sir, he did. There, unfortunately, the matter seemed to drop. I didn't see any further opening, and so we waited till next time.

The next time we became quite angry at once. We asked for the head-waiter. He was very busy—poor fellow, he has a bit of a rush about lunch-time—and could not come for fifteen minutes. When he did come we had each eaten our tomato, so we could not very well complain with confidence. We congratulated him on the cold beef instead. He remarked that he would pass on our favourable comments to the chef concerned.

The next time it occurred we caught him on the hop. Percival summoned him while I collected data. When he came we showed him the menu, and the price, and put the slices together for him

to see that they only made—One Medium-sized Tomato. We said it was scandalous and he oughtn't to allow it. He said he was sorry but he could do nothing ; he was a mere head-waiter ; we were both members. Why didn't I 'back my bill'? I replied in stern tones that that was just what I intended to do. Things can go too far, I said ; like that ; quite firmly. I then retired to the smoking-room to ask Percival in secrecy exactly how one did 'back a bill'. Percival said he had been going to ask me that one. So together we went off and asked the Club Bore.

What the Club Bore doesn't know about 'backing a bill' could be written on a postage stamp with wide margins and half a page over. He 'backs' every bill he has ever had with some complaint or another and, I understand, has even been known to have 'backed' a sheet of Club notepaper with a complaint about the size of its back. By tea-time we had acquired a good working knowledge of what to do. We drew lots as to who should be the forward complainant. I lost.

Next day, at lunch, I wrote on the back of my bill, while Percival breathed heavily over my shoulder : '. . . I consider sixpence an excessive charge for One Medium-sized Tomato.'

We then waited eagerly for several days to see what happened. At last I got my bill back with a note to say my complaint would be attended to. I rushed instantly into the dining-room and ordered tomato salad. Percival, as an independent witness, at once reassembled it, and we found again

One Medium-sized Tomato. So I had my bill made out in duplicate, backed and fronted both of it, and awaited events.

The events were, a week later, a request to speak to the Club secretary. I prepared myself fully for the interview and Percival shook my hand reassuringly outside the door. I turned up with :

(*a*) A copy of the Club menu.
(*b*) A specimen pound of tomatoes from a grocer.
(*c*) The grocer's receipt showing price.
(*d*) A specimen tomato—equivalent in size to my One Medium-sized Tomato.
(*e*) A sum in arithmetic on Club notepaper.

The secretary, however, merely said to me : ' Oh, I'm sorry to trouble you, Mr. Apple, but the Club cashed a cheque for you the other day on which you had forgotten to put the *branch* of the bank concerned. If you wouldn't mind just filling it in . . .'

I did so, opened my mouth to give tongue to my complaint, saw that he was busy, and took my tomatoes and my bills and my sums in arithmetic away again. I then led Percival to the Silence Room, where we wrote a four-page personal letter to the secretary explaining the matter and ending with a magnificent peroration, signed by both of us, in which we suggested (*a*) that more tomatoes be supplied in a sixpenny salad, or alternatively (*b*) that the price of the present style of one-tomato-powered salad be lowered.

While waiting for an answer we told half a dozen of our friends about it, and they all agreed

that it was scandalous and that they were glad some one had taken the matter up boldly. We talked a lot about the economics of tomatoes.

A few days later we received a courteous letter from the secretary stating that, while he hardly considered it necessary to convene an extraordinary general meeting, a full assembly of the committee had gone into the matter and that instructions had been issued that a tomato salad should have more than one tomato in it.

We told more acquaintances of our triumph and knowingly we ordered a test tomato salad at lunch. Several of our friends laughed at us, and Percival swears he heard one of the waiters whisper to another that the price of tomatoes was down in the Stock Exchange.

When the salad came we carefully put the slices together. They were badly mixed up—the chef's idea of revenge, I suppose. But I discovered at last that I had *two* tomatoes.

Even so, I am rather worried, because they are both small ones, and though neither of us knows enough arithmetic to work out cubic content, we have a strong suspicion that these two small tomatoes are only equal in total size to the original One Medium-sized Tomato.

IV. TASTING

THE other day I took Percival to see an uncle of mine who is rather a special uncle, because he has something to do with wine. I do not mean to say that having something to do with wine in itself lends a man any particular *cachet*; there is not one of us who could not have quite a lot to do with a bottle of champagne and yet remain a fairly ordinary sort of chap after it. No; I mean my uncle has to do with wine almost in an official capacity, and therefore *understands* it. In a word, he 'knows wine'. He is familiar with any kind of brand you care to mention. He will punch it in the cork, so to speak, and call it robust; he will pat its head and pronounce it nearly adult; or he will taste it and condemn it as a wine of no character—a weak, incompetent wine with a receding chin. And he can tell that one vintage of port is ripe and forward, and another delicate and refined, and behave correspondingly to either. A great man.

Percival and I sat in the arm-chairs and discussed glasses of port. At least I discussed mine, having picked up the correct actions; Percival merely drank his. The uncle talked familiarly about ports he had known in the old days, and once quite reverently about a senile burgundy his father used to admire. I made no remark except the psychological 'Quite so'. The conversation wasn't in my class. If large men in shirt-sleeves

in Kent tell me the hops are coming along nicely, I know where I am ; but to talk about a port of nice full body seems to me to verge on the indelicate. However, you know what men are when they get together after lunch.

Ten minutes or so later Percival casually lit up his pipe. Ten seconds or so later we were both being shown out.

Percival was a bit indignant when I explained that a bare generation ago he would not have got away with his life, let alone with his pipe. He argued his tobacco was good, and that people could be connoisseurs in other things besides wine. He added that there were good tobaccos and bad tobaccos, to which I retorted—somewhat crudely, for the man had spoilt all my hopes of a second glass—that he evidently couldn't tell them apart or he wouldn't be smoking that particular mixture ; and then he said . . . Well, anyhow, a certain acrimony developed between us which finally led to our having a tobacco-tasting contest next day in my flat.

Percival came round after dinner. He had several paper screws of the better-known tobaccos, labelled and numbered, which his tobacconist had privately selected for him. These we gave unexamined to Frances and asked her to arrange them on a table without the labels but with the distinguishing numbers.

'Bless their little hearts!' said Frances. 'What are they going to play at now?'

I told her rather stiffly that we were going to have a hard smoking match that night, strong men

puffing pipe against pipe to the very ash, testing, tasting, judging, till . . .

'All right, all right,' said Frances hurriedly. 'I only asked. Mind you don't make yourselves sick!'

Women *are* so terribly maternal at times.

When she had arranged everything, we entered and found eight numbered piles of unknown brown weed on the table. We each had a piece of paper to jot down out remarks and conclusions. Anyone, by the way, who so far forgot the respect due to tobacco as to drink a glass of port with it would be at once disqualified. Needless to say, this rule was made by Percival.

'Ready?' I said and borrowed his matches. 'Go!'

We took half a pipeful of the first heap and lit up. With a supercilious smile, Percival at once wrote secretly on his paper. I guessed from his rapid decision that this was probably his own pet mixture—the one he pretends he has specially made to measure for him—so with a malicious smile I wrote on my sheet :

'No. 1.—*Percival's Own.* A very poor vintage of highly suspicious, not to say undesirable, character. The picking of the crop was hindered by climatic conditions (apparently a thick and acrid fog), with the result that the yield of leaf was reduced and had to be subsequently padded out with sea-weed and chopped straw. Non-combatants should be warned in advance.'

I then finished the pipe with some enjoyment.

I felt I had had my revenge on Percival for his *gaffe* of yesterday. After which we moved on to the next pile.

At the end of three-quarters of an hour my paper read :

'No. 2.—Probably *Tennessee Golden Shred*. An over-fruity tobacco. Somewhat damp, especially behind the ears. Poor : if a good wine needs no bush a good tobacco should need no forced draught.

'No. 3.—*Skipper's Plug*. A strong vintage tobacco of robust character. Almost too robust for me. A pipe of this should be laid down at once.

'No. 4.—Perhaps *Black African*. A very dry mixture. On second thoughts may be *Best Darjeeling* ?

'No. 5.—*Jasmin d'Orient*. An elegant smoke with body (chiefly foreign). All the mystery of the Orient is in this vintage—or seems to be ; though a dead lotus bud and some strands of camel-fur were all that I identified. A remarkably interesting mixture and one that will no doubt repay further investigation.

'No. 6.—Unknown. Was apparently badly corked, but I did not realize this till I had used all the matches trying to make the cork draw. Advise my successors, heirs, and assigns to use paraffin when starting up from cold. It will not spoil *this* mixture.

No. 7.—? Best hand-picked oakum.'

No. 8, with deep thought and a moist forehead, I guessed wildly as '*Ploughboy's Shag*'; and then we corrected our papers.

Out of the first seven it was a dead heat, three right each, though I consider myself the winner because Percival was so annoyed about my No. 1. No. 8, however, we could not judge, because neither Percival, nor I, nor Frances could find the label.

'And now we shall never know,' I said, at which Percival, at once on his mettle, took another half-pipe of it. After a moment he admitted that it was unlike any tobacco he had ever known, but said it had a *cachet* of its own, a *je-ne-sais-quoi*, a *quelque-chose-d'imprévenu*; in fact, he got quite excited about it. Finally he said it must be a mixture he had once heard of called '*Sultan's Bliss*', much used in Turkey, though, personally, I should imagine that the Eastern potentates only employed it to stuff leaks in the harem hookah. On the other hand, there certainly was a something about it which set it in a class by itself, a fragrance not of this world, like a veritable 'Imperial Tokay' of tobaccos. I puffed out a wreathing cloud and thought dreamily of my childhood in my grandmother's garden, and, in particular, of the place behind the summer-house where they used to burn the rubbish. . . .

Then quite suddenly we both decided we didn't care what it was. . . .

Percival has not yet discovered the name of that mixture, and I shan't tell him just at present, because I can do more good with the information

later on. And, anyway, I am still arguing with Frances about it. If a woman feels she *must* transplant the crocuses she might at least be careful what she does with the fibre-compost. Though, mark you, I have a faint suspicion that she did it on purpose, because of a complaint of mine, some while ago, that she had given me for lunch a dish of steak and fried hyacinths.

V. A QUESTION OF LANGUAGE

SOME while ago Percival and I and our friend Henry, who is just back from the East, visited one of the many Chinese restaurants in London. Henry did not want to go ; I think he felt he had hardly been struggling for some years to exist on expensive food and drink in Shanghai in order to come home to London and eat expensive chop-suey. But we insisted ; because Henry is a qualified Chinese interpreter, and, though shy, he can if roused speak the language like a leak in a pneumatic riveter, and we wanted to hear him.

Kipling once stated that East and West never met, but he cannot have visited a Chinese restaurant in London. In the place we entered there was a marked Occidoriental atmosphere, expressed chiefly by white tablecloths, embroidered hangings, the smell of joss-stick and the perfume of fried onion. The head-waiter, though Chinese, spoke good English ; but to my annoyance Henry, though an interpreter, would not speak Chinese.

When Percival at last asked him to unloose a few bars, he murmured that he couldn't do it in cold blood.

'Come on,' we encouraged him ; 'here's the table-waiter. Tell him I'm going to pung a second helping of this Hi Tin Tung ! '

Blushing under his seasoning, Henry diffidently remarked something to our Celestial which sounded like water-hammer in next door's bathroom tap.

The Celestial smiled blandly. 'No speakee,' he explained in kindly fashion. 'Me Canton-side.'

Henry, it appeared, only spoke Northern Chinese, and scarlet with shame he buried himself in his food—a steaming plateful of last week's garden bonfire after an afternoon's rain. He said not a further word till the coffee ; at which stage he inadvertently laid his cigarette on the tablecloth and burnt a large hole.

Henry, rather overcome, at once offered to pay for the damage ; whereupon the head-waiter, talking rapidly, stripped off the linen and displayed the soiled table-cloth of the previous occupants underneath, also neatly cauterized. For this Henry naturally refused to be responsible ; and became really angry when the waiter, investigating yet earlier strata, came upon an almost Archaean formation, in the shape of a third burnt tablecloth under the second.

Once roused, as I said, Henry loses his shyness. These researches into lunch-table geology provoked him to a snappy couple of feet of dialect which sent the scared head-waiter scurrying for the manager. Percival and I just sat back in awe.

The manager appeared bowing, a stout China-man in perfect English dress and with a perfect American accent. He deprecated the whole busi-ness, but suggested that since Henry had offered to pay the damage, he should do so. Henry emitted another blast of Chinese which only sailed harmlessly over the manager's head, since with true business instinct the fellow merely

indicated his willingness to make a reduction for quantity.

Henry lapsed into good Anglo-Saxon, and pointed out that there should only have been one tablecloth on the table. The manager hotly denied this imputation of niggardliness, and took the view that Henry was lucky to have been merely lunching. Had it been dinner, and had they had a good day, he might have tapped half a dozen tablecloths at one blow.

With a look of intense wrath Henry rose up and remarked through his teeth :

' Tun - ah - ping - tun - ah - mama - tun - ah - hum - ba-long ! '

It was obviously Chinese swearing of the worst kind, and the manager, putting a shocked hand to his ears, straightway sent out for a policeman.

After a strained interval—which apparently taxed Percival's nerves considerably, for he let me inadvertently finish his drink—a large London constable appeared, massively Occidental.

' Now, now, now ! What's all this 'ere ? ' he began in the immemorial tradition.

The manager indicated Henry and said he had used bad language at him.

' Ho ! ' said the policeman. ' And did you ? '

' I did,' replied Henry shortly.

The policeman drew a note-book from his pocket and moistened a fragmentary pencil with an enveloping tongue. Then he wrote down the date and place, looked at Henry over the top of his book with poised pencil, and said sternly :

' Now, sir, what did you say to 'im ? '

'*Tun - ah - ping - tun - ah - mama - tun - ah - hum - ba-long!*' stated Henry pleasantly.

The constable rocked on his foundations. His jaw fell on to his chin-strap and he nearly dropped his pencil. Then he pulled himself together and inquired suspiciously: 'I beg yours?'

'*Tun - ah - ping - tun - ah - mama - tun - ah - hum - ba-long!*' remarked Henry patiently.

'Ho!' said the constable after deep thought. He studied his pencil-point and added: 'Ho, did you!'

'I'm afraid I did,' said Henry.

'Well, what's it all mean?' asked the policeman cautiously.

'Pardon me,' Henry said politely; 'I've told you what I *said*. I'm not aware that I have to tell you what I *mean*.'

The policeman turned to Percival and me. We shook our heads. He turned to the manager.

'What's it mean?' he reiterated.

The manager said that there was one word there which he could not possibly mention aloud, a word so insulting, a word so . . .

The constable fingered his book doubtfully. 'Seems to me,' he said at length, 'I'm not wanted.' He was about to depart when he had an idea. 'What's the rest of it mean then?' he hopefully asked the Chinese manager. 'All except that word?'

The Chinaman bent a virulently impassive look on Henry.

'That I do not know,' he said with dignity. 'I only recognized the one word. I was born

and educated in America, and speak nothing but English.'

He turned and walked away angrily. So did the policeman—thoughtfully. So did Henry—forgetfully. So did I—purposely. And Percival, poor boob, had to stop and pay the bill. Three lunches and three tablecloths.

VI. ADVICE

SUDLEIGH of our Club is at all times most helpful and most unruffled. His speciality is giving advice. He infests the Club by day and occupies one of the Club bedrooms by night—in case anyone may need a little calm advice at any hour. He can give advice on anything, from aard-varks to zythepsaries and from lanoline to Leagues of Nations—and always most coolly, calmly, and dispassionately.

It is, in fact, this calmness which every one finds so annoying; but Sudleigh seems to bear a charmed life. Take, for instance, the other day, when Admiral Sir Ivor Rascible smashed up his new car on a street refuge while endeavouring to avoid a mongrel pup. Every one listened in sympathetic silence while he described the incident, just after it happened, in straightforward sailorly fashion, but it was Sudleigh who at the end said very calmly and judicially: 'Well, Rascible, if I may advise you, next time I *should not try* to avoid the dog.' As the Admiral's only hope in life at the moment seemed to be to meet that dog again in a blind alley while driving a steam roller that just fitted, it was really wonderful that Sudleigh got away. He drifted off, while a few friends were loosening Rascible's collar, and a moment later we heard him advising a waiter in dispassionate tones to open a window.

Then last week the incident occurred which

has reduced Sudleigh to a mere heap of nervous diffidence.

There are in the Club about a score of young members, among whom Percival and I are numbered—absolute children the older members call us, for not one of us is a day over thirty-five. Daily these older members point out to the chairman, the secretary, or any member of the committee who hasn't been able to get away in time, that this is a Club not a crèche ; but it makes no difference. In their eyes, we young members go on just the same. We talk loudly to one another before lunch when the old gentlemen are sitting and thinking. We rustle papers in their ear after lunch when they are just sitting ; while from five to seven, when respectable people are trying to collect their thoughts and decide what to order for dinner, we are more than usually exuberant over cocktails. But it was this exuberance of ours that was the cause of Sudleigh's downfall.

It happened that Percival and I, hearing that a mutual friend had come up for the night, went along to the Club bedrooms to look for him. We identified his room at last by a suit-case, with his name, just inside the door, but he was not there although apparently he had already unpacked one suit-case and put some of his things about the room. Since he was absent and the room looked to us untidy, we decided it would be but the merest act of kindliness as between friends to tidy it up for him.

So we did what little we could. We took his

clean collars out of the drawer and put them in the grate ; we draped his handkerchiefs over the pictures ; we took his pyjamas off the bed, and to keep them cool immersed them in the water-jug and hung it all out of the window by a rope of white ties. We adjusted the spring mattress of his bed to make it more comfortable—in such a way in fact that he would notice the comfort immediately he got into it ; we changed all the detachable buttons of his white waistcoats which we found in the drawers over to the wrong side ; we filled his shoes with water to prevent his feet getting overheated ; and we fastened every sock we could find end to end like a string of sausages. Finally we seized upon the bag by the door, which he had not yet unpacked, and did it for him—by emptying its contents in a heap under the bed.

Then because we are really modest by nature and do not like to be thanked for any little act of kindness to a fellow-creature, we stole out and went down to the smoking-room. Here we met our friend having a drink and he told us his room was No. 10.

Now the room in which our loving hands had been so busy was No. 11, and when we had recovered we guessed what had happened, namely, that one of the Club valets taking up our friend's bag had found No. 10 locked and had temporarily put the bag down in the next (and already engaged) room while he got the keys. Before he had returned we had happened along and fallen into a very natural error. In short, we were disappointed to realize that our attentions had been

wasted on a total stranger's attire and personal belongings. We glanced round the room full of stern faces and picked out ones to whom we felt we would like least to have to explain. Admiral Sir Ivor Rascible was of course first in this class. Finally we decided to ask old Sudleigh's advice as to what to do.

Sudleigh was almost overwhelmed. For ten years now he had been giving advice in the Club and this was the first time for seven of them that anyone had asked him for it first.

He listened, saying ' Tut-tut ! ' at intervals, and then spoke. He advised us very calmly not to say anything about it ; and he pointed out dispassionately that the valet would probably repack the bag himself and say nothing more, horrified at having been so bold as to put it in an occupied room.

Percival and I said we weren't bothering about our friend's bag so much as about what we had done to the room and the clothes of a total stranger. Sudleigh very judicially explained that nobody minded a little fun, and that if the owner of the room could not see a joke he would be very narrow-minded. He said that if the unknown knew who had done it he would probably be the first to come and have a good laugh with us about it. He advised us, however, not to put this to the test, as some people in the Club were notoriously deficient of a sense of humour. He then added very kindly that he would make it his business to see the person concerned, if we would tell him who it was, and that, in short, without mentioning names, he would just put the matter right for us.

We said we didn't know the name, but it was the one in No. 11 room. Whereupon Sudleigh went green and purple, choked violently, looked at us with strong emotion, and rushed from the room.

Sudleigh has never been the same again. Only yesterday I heard some one ask what he advised about something, and Sudleigh blushed and then stammered that he didn't know.

The older members now all like the young members better than they did. They say that we are so lively and exuberant and it's sometimes a pleasure to have us about.

VII. SWARMS AND SWARMS

PERCIVAL and I spent last week-end in the country studying bees. Bees, we find, repay a bit of study. It is a great advantage to be able to tell from the look in a bee's eye whether it is advancing upon you in a cold fury, or merely under the mistaken impression that your left ear is a columbine. The result is of course unfortunately the same.

Our original intention, I may say, was to half-close our eyes and study them from a deck-chair as they flew past, but our host, the Colonel, had quite different ideas about it. He is very fond of his bees, knows most of them by name, and likes to introduce people to them; with the result that we soon found ourselves standing timorously on the edge of the lawn, looking at a lot of white boxes and saying, 'How nice!' There was a considerable coming and going of bees in the air about us, and I personally was just wondering if I could retire with discretion to my chair, when the Colonel yelled suddenly, 'Swarm, by Jove!' and dashed for the house. We stood about for a moment rather bewildered and saying 'Where?' till all of a sudden the air round us became unpleasantly congested with bees. Percival thereupon got under a deck-chair and I retreated behind a large bush, from which dug-outs we apprehensively watched a mass of bees revolving rapidly very high up.

The Colonel returned at a hand-canter with several yards of muslin, a tin pan, a garden squirt, and the Bee Lady from next door. We were both dragged out from concealment. Percival was given the muslin to hold—a tricky job which made him look like something Aphrodite, and I was handed the pan and told to bang it.

It is funny how late on in years one realizes one's earliest ambitions. Life for me from four to eight had been a melancholy series of frustrated attempts to bang my fill on a tin pan, and now here I was, over twenty years later, being actually cheered on to it. I banged away, while the Colonel squirted water up at the mass of bees, and Percival, for some unexplained reason, manfully held the muslin. The idea, I gathered, was to give them the impression that a nasty thundershower was just coming on and so induce them to swarm on something nearby and let themselves be bottled up in a skep. The muslin perhaps represented another rain-cloud in the distance.

After twenty minutes we were all very wet, very tired, and very deaf ; but the bees hadn't got the hang of the thing at all. They were, perhaps, rather dense bees who didn't know much about swarming drill. At any rate, in an unconcerned manner they now began to move off into the surrounding forest. We followed, banging and squirting, and in Percival's case tripping over muslin. The Colonel said that in order to claim your bees when they do finally swarm you must keep your eye on them. This is all right played slowly. At an ordinary bee-rate, however, it

has a blindfold cross-country obstacle-race beaten hollow.

They swarmed a mile and a half away on a bough twenty foot up, and the Colonel, having posted pickets, went home for more paraphernalia and the car. He came back looking like a gipsy caravan which was selling sports-gear as a side-line. He had everything in the car from a landing-net and two fishing-rods to six single-sticks and a fencing-mask. The only thing he seemed to have forgotten was a battle-axe, but I thought we could make shift without it. We settled down to detach the swarm, which had now set absolutely solid like a mass of putty, into a skep held up from underneath.

We got them as they fell, though they splashed considerably all over the Colonel. He did not, however, get stung. After long service in India a bee would have to be fitted with a diamond drill to make any impression on him. The Bee Lady, as usual, was covered with friendly bees, and seemed to like it. She laughed nastily at me because I watched all this part through a fencing-mask —with binoculars. Percival was quite brazenly gathering wild strawberries or something about half a mile away.

We wrapped the skep up in a rug and brought it home, and it was while it was being decanted gently into the hive that the bees started to dislike me. I was just standing about watching in an interested manner and doing nothing to any of them, when a bee flew straight at me with a noise like an aeroplane. I hadn't said a word to

it, but I could see it had an offended look. They say bees can do fifty miles an hour, but I beat it to the greenhouse at the side of the lawn by four-fifths of a second and locked myself in with a triumphant laugh.

Then the laugh faded suddenly as I realized that in my panic I had locked the bee in with me. We frantically circled the inside of the greenhouse twice, and finally the bee and I jammed in the doorway trying to get out together. During the rush I was stung on the forehead.

When I returned warily, the Bee Lady was sitting at one side of the hive, embedded in bees, and throwing more bees in by handfuls. The Colonel was sitting on the other side, and about a dozen bees were taking it in turns to try and puncture him. Percival—again at a safe distance, the dirty hound—was laughing at me.

'Surely you haven't been stung, Mr. Apple?' the Bee Lady asked sarcastically, brushing a pint of bees from her forehead in order to see more clearly.

'Yes,' I replied shortly. I was beginning to dislike that Bee Lady even more than Percival. . . .

My second spurt for the green-house was made in slightly better time, as I was ready for it. I left the bee outside this time and after rattling the handle angrily, it went away in a huff.

When I crept out a little later it emerged triumphantly from behind a geranium, where it had been in hiding, and stung me on the forehead. Percival laughed raucously, whereat a bee, which I am certain was just going to sting him, sheered off in alarm.

'Not again?' asked the Bee Lady with a humorous look, as I rejoined the party.

I made no answer. I was hopefully waiting till she got stung herself. It didn't seem far off, especially as within ten minutes Percival had left the party with cries of alarm and terrific celerity.

At last came my moment. The Bee Lady started to rub her wrist.

'Ah, have *you* been stung?' I queried nastily.

'Yes,' replied the Bee Lady angrily, speaking through a cloud of bees, 'in the wood this afternoon—by a beastly midge!'

There is something I don't like about that Bee Lady, but I didn't have time to think what it was, because I had to do another sprint. There were two bees this time and they both stung me on the forehead. I spent the rest of the day in the greenhouse.

I came down to breakfast next morning with a forehead on me like Mussolini, but I ate nearly a pound of honey by way of revenge.

VIII. THE *REAL* CHINESE RESTAURANT

A FEW pages back I told you about a visit I paid to a Chinese restaurant with a friend called Henry who happened to be a Chinese interpreter. We made several discoveries there, among others the fact that the Chinese manager could speak only American. Upon my public statement of this I had many indignant letters, the gist of which was the same, namely :

'What do you expect if you go to a so-called Chinese place like that? You might as well expect to find emperors at the "Imperial" or grandees at the "Grand". You should go to a *real* Chinese restaurant and stop writing tosh about fashionable fakes.'

Though, as a matter of fact, I think they put it a little more politely than that ; it was what they meant. And when I came to think of it, they were right. There was a little too much window-dressing for the restaurant to be genuine ; too much of the Wun-Wing-An-Tung costing

in big letters on the front of the menu, and 'Plate of Tongue and Chicken (wing)—5s. 6d.' in small letters on the back. And though there were chopsticks scattered over every table like the third chukka of a spillikins match, the only implements we or anyone else used were a spoon and fork. In

fact, the restaurant was really quite an ordinary one with a mere Oriental veneer for the benefit of those who like to talk about it afterwards.

So when I had received the seventh letter on the subject I set out to discover something really Chinese, and I took Percival with me.

We found it; and we did not go down to Limehouse either. The pseudo-Chinese place had been overwhelmingly Oriental from the outside; this one, following the same unknown law, was distressingly English. It was called simply

DINING ROOM

Propr.: P. Pong

and the one small waiter was ninety per cent English too. The clientèle, however, was Oriental to the last man. On every table were little piles of chopsticks, each pair neatly sealed up in a paper envelope with the Chinese maker's name printed thereon. There was no doubt that the place was genuine.

Our table was something like a dressing-table fitted with toilet bottles and powder boxes, except that it also had a gas-ring and a frying-pan, which you do not find in the best bedrooms. From the waiter we gathered with some consternation that we were supposed to cook our own food. This was a nasty shock; neither Percival nor I are *cordon bleu*, though during the Great War my fried bacon *à la* army biscuit was held to be quite fair, if one had not eaten for some while.

We were even more appalled when we saw the

food we had to cook, even though we had ordered the simplest thing on the list Besides a plate of raw meat and a saucer of pickles, there was a dish, piled several inches high, of mixed vegetables, and only three out of the score or so varieties did we recognize. The waiter, when questioned, further pointed out bamboo-shoot and sections of palm-leaf, and I think something called a Taiping mud-marrow, but even he said, 'Blest if *I* know, sir,' to one or two of the more improbable ones which looked like *mésalliances* between East Wind and Green Dragon in a Mah-jongg set. He offered to call up Mr. Pong, the manager, who would explain, but we were too shy. Besides, for Mr. Pong to name everything we didn't know in the dish would take too long.

'Well,' said Percival glumly, 'I suppose we'd better begin. I hope nobody is watching us.'

Glancing furtively round we saw we were unobserved, and so Percival tried to light the gas-ring. There was an enormous explosion, no flame, and an overpowering smell of escaping gas.

We were no longer unobserved. The other clients at once turned amused eyes upon us; for whereas a European may be excused for poor chopstick work, lighting a gas-ring should be his subject. The only one who didn't smile was our Next Table, who had had a nicely poised and promising bit of bamboo-shoot blown into his toilet vinegar.

We got the ring going and looked about for lard to put in the hot pan. We found it on the vegetable dish; but discovered almost immediately

that it wasn't lard after all. It looked like it, but was really a lump of unexplained vegetable. Probably it was a bit of Tidore sea-pineapple or even a stray trepang. Anyway it began to jump about, popping loudly at intervals like a machine-gun. By the time that, playing alternate mashie shots with our chopsticks, we had got it out on to the tablecloth, our Next Table had had himself moved to the far end of the room with every indication of Celestial alarm.

After this we didn't fare so badly, though I have never before realized what peculiar things vegetables do under the influence of heat. A flat slice like an exhibit in a forestry exhibition, split up into several score concentric rings; and, believe me, if anything is hard to eat with chopsticks it is a ring of food which suddenly slides down on to your wrist, like a game of nursery quoits. Then the Taiping mud-marrow, when heated up, slowly dwindled and dwindled, at the same time taking a gradually deepening violet hue, till at the end it disappeared completely—apparently, I should say, into the invisible ultra-violet portion of the spectrum.

It took us a long while to cook our meal—and even longer to eat it. We conducted the business, however, to the manner born; except when Percival, deceived by the way in which his chopsticks had originally been encased in tissue paper, inadvertently put one end of them into his glass and sucked for some while at the other, under the impression they were straws.

Pausing but to massage our wrists occasionally,

we ploughed through the mounds of food to a triumphant conclusion. At last we lay back exhausted. We had finished everything—except two long slivers of paper-like vegetable which neither of us could do anything with.

We eventually gave them up, but the discussion as to their identity persisted till we rose to depart, Percival maintaining it was a shaving of the dried pith of the areca palm, while I put it down as Pling-plung or native marsh-salsify.

At this point Mr. Pong, the manager, appeared to bow us out, and we put it to him. He studied it and was equally puzzled for a few minutes. It almost seemed as if it was an unauthorized interloper. Then a grin creased his face, and, not having English enough to explain, he pointed silently to one end of the unknown sliver. There, faintly showing through the brown of prolonged frying, was the word ' Ah-Wong '.

At first we did not understand. To have an autographed vegetable seemed unusual. Then Mr. Pong grinned again and pointed to the same name elsewhere. It was printed on the end of the long tissue paper envelope in which the chopsticks were each put up. We thanked him politely and left.

IX. PERCIVAL'S NEW CAR

PERCIVAL has bought a new car. He didn't exactly mean to, but he got into a press of people in Knightsbridge going to the motor-show and found himself in Olympia before he could force his way to the outskirts. Here, apparently, the impressionable mutt encountered suave and persuasive young men who in rapid succession practically sold him a Cowford, a Baby Exhaustion, a Smeltz, and a Lightningcrack, besides presenting him with a park-full of miscellaneous paper on the subject of automobiles. They were in the act of further making him the possessor of a new Phord, complete with two jokes, when a faint suspicion entered their minds. After a heated argument between the various salesmen as to who saw him first it was eventually proved that the Cowford stand had prior rights, and under a battery of pitying smiles he was allowed to depart with a Cowford and a caution.

Percival was very pleased with his purchase when it arrived. He at once took it round to his pet garage to have a few extra gadgets put on it ; for Percival is a dashboard driver, if you know what I mean. He doesn't really mind—like most men—whether the engine is a super-six with overhead valves and emergency exits to all cylinders ; nor does he care—like most women—whether the body is nude or woad in colour. All Percival asks for is a good dashboard full of

switches and levers and dials, something like the more private parts of a submarine ; and he scans the minor advertisement columns of the motoring Press as long as he has a spare square inch of space. The result of course is terrifying to any friend who is in the front seat with him, and induces an inferiority complex almost immediately.

By the time Percival had finished with his new Cowford the dashboard part of it looked something like a cross between the front-door of a safe deposit vault and an instrument maker's shop-window. There were switches for every conceivable light, from dashboard light to spot headlight, as well as for the dynamo and the engine ; there were gauges to tell you whether you were going up hill, and if so how up, and needles to say how much oil there was or which was magnetic north ; there was a lever to shroud the carburettor, and, a more familiar lever, to tickle the carburettor. There was a thing to light your cigarette at ; and a thing—though I am not quite sure about this, because I was never allowed to try—which gave you a glass of bitter when you pressed the button.

That evening Percival took me out ' for a spin, old man '. A drive with Percival is always exhausting, because Percival being busy driving, it falls to you to read dials and gauges and turn switches.

Nothing much, however, happened till the great breakdown. We went out into the country, using every gadget in turn, till we suddenly realized we would be late for dinner if we didn't whizz back

at once. At the top of a hill, however, still some way out of London, a policeman shouted to us.

'What's he want?' asked Percival. 'What speed are we doing?'

'Two and a half,' I replied briskly, peering down at the array of instruments, now hardly visible in the dusk, and reading in error the hill-gauge or the beer-dial or something.

'Perhaps I had better pull up and ask what he . . .' Percival was beginning doubtfully, when I had a brain-wave.

'After lighting-up time,' I explained, and grinned broadly. Of all his battery of switches Percival had omitted to use the only one which the law insisted he should.

'Good Lord! Switch on the sidelights quick,' cried Percival, as he ran over the crest out of sight of the gesticulating Robert.

I reached forward and fumbled wildly. A beam like a searchlight leapt from our starboard bow illuminating the road a mile or so into the next county, and frightening a meditative roadside cat up to the top of an elm in one and a half seconds.

'*Side*lights, not *spot*light, you fool!' roared Percival, as we ran on down the hill. 'Or put on the dashboard light if you can't see,' he added, as, still fumbling in the gloaming, I shrouded the carburettor, set the trip speedometer back to 'O', and nearly started up the cigarette lighter.

I put on the headlights, switched the spot off, roved round a bit more, and at last got the sidelights on. Then I sank back into my seat. Driving with Percival, as I said, is exhausting.

It was to be even more exhausting. For at the bottom of the hill we had our breakdown. Percival swore and got out, saying we had run out of juice. But we found we still had several gallons. So he lifted the bonnet in an efficient manner and peered inside very knowingly.

I sat as still as possible staring at the winking points of light on the dashboard and hoping to be overlooked. I drew a blank. After two minutes I had to get out and make suggestions for Percival to turn down. Even this did not please ; nothing but manual labour on my part would satisfy him. So, together, for three-quarters of an hour by the beams of Percival's searchlight we dismantled the carburettor, took out and cleaned all four plugs, traced the petrol to its source and tested it to see that it was not water by mistake, inspected the oil and the magneto, and in fact did everything that a skilled mechanic, with a Watson assistant, could possibly have done. Throughout the proceedings the engine (swung repeatedly by me after Percival had used up his self-starter) refused even a single backfire.

At last we pushed the vehicle with the aid of two men at two bob per man to a garage, and while the fellow was dealing with it we used up our last ounce of strength in tottering over to the nearest for a quick.

When we came back the car was going sweetly. The mechanic accepted five bob (I could see I was the only helper who was not being paid for my exertions) and told us he couldn't exactly say what had been the fault—but that he had overhauled

everything, and under his charm of manner it had just started up nicely. For this modest confession he got an extra sixpence.

'Now I wonder,' began Percival, half an hour later for the seventeenth time, as we neared home, 'what *was* the matter? I noticed that she began to feel funny just after I switched on the sidelights half-way down the hill.'

'What?' I cried. 'Just after *you* switched on the sidelights?'

'Yes. You were fumbling about so with the switches that I did it myself. Why?'

'Oh, nothing,' I said and was silent.

I am still silent. And now that I have inspected the dashboard again in daylight I am going to keep silent for ever. For although I thought *I* had turned the sidelights on, it was Percival who had really done it. But certainly at that same instant I had also turned a switch; and there is near the sidelight switch another one, very similar to the touch, which switches the engine on. Or off.

But don't tell Percival, will you, you chaps?

X. THE PASSING OF *LA FLOR*

TO this day I don't know why I bought it. It must have been the result of one of those reckless moods which seize you upon the rare occasions when you have just had champagne for lunch at some one else's expense ; occasions when you realize that the world is by rights yours but for that stupid little error in the title-deeds ; and when a friend has only to make a suggestion, however absurd, for you to act upon it—provided he throws into his voice a certain amount of disbelief as to your capability.

Yes, I now feel certain that must be why I bought it. I know I had had a champagne lunch put up by Percival's uncle. I know Percival and I were walking down the Burlington Arcade (which at the moment belonged to me), and I am positive he made some derogatory remark about my ability to buy *La Flor.*

Mind you, *La Flor* was no ordinary cigar. Its full name, titles, and rank went something like this : *' La Flor del Excepcionales Marvillosados y Perfectos Immensos con Esplendidos,* and I should say the designer and builder meant every word of it. It gave the impression of being several feet long and as thick as your wrist. It had a gaudy cummerbund about its stomach, like an alderman wearing the Bessarabian Order of Corpulence (Second Class). And it occupied the central position of honour in the tobacconist's window,

together with some stout gold-mounted walking-sticks. In fact, at first I rather thought it *was* a very stout gold-mounted walking-stick.

The man didn't seem inclined to sell me *La Flor* at the start of our talk. He said they were made specially for Lord Forcedraught, who was the only man who had ever smoked one right through. Then he said it was really an advertisement, in a manner of speaking. Then he said he didn't think he had any more in from the factory or machine-shop, or wherever it is they turn them out. Finally, as under Percival's incredulous and scornful eye I became really insistent, he sold me *La Flor* in all its glory.

It cost an awful lot ; but, hang it, one doesn't get champagne given one for lunch every day, does one ? He packed it up with tissue paper and straw and cotton-wool in a kind of cardboard crate that looked as though it had been originally designed to hold a flute. I asked if there was a paper of instructions to go with it, and he said superciliously he didn't think so, but gave me a few verbal hints about keeping it in an even temperature and the best way of starting up from cold. I thanked him, and then Percival and I each shouldered one end of the crate and left the shop.

By tea-time I was wondering why I had bought the thing. By six o'clock I was wondering why the devil I had bought the thing. By seven o'clock I was wondering why people did such silly things as to take champagne in the middle of the day. By the end of the evening I had given it

to Percival, who said he had a friend in a City office who had just the figure for a cigar like that and would appreciate the gift. So he took it away late that night in a taxi. The driver charged him sixpence extra, and one end stuck out of the window.

I heard nothing more till the following evening, when Percival with a solemn face brought me a file of documents. Apparently his business friend was of a humorous turn of mind, and this (coupled, I should imagine, with a slack day in the office) had led him to send Percival intermittent bulletins of the progress of *La Flor del Excepcionales Marvillosados y Perfectos Immensos con Esplendidos*. As the shopman had said, it had proved too much for one man alone and the whole office staff had dealt in turn with it.

At about ten a.m., I gathered from Percival, his friend had got the end of *La Flor* supported to his satisfaction on a pile of books at the far side of his desk and had had it formally touched off with a port-fire. The first bulletin a few minutes later read :

'*La Flor* assumed to be burning well at far end. Can distinctly see smoke.'

A short while afterwards a triumphant second bulletin was issued, stating :

'Smoke now reached my end of *La Flor*, but find it hard work to maintain draught necessary for continuous current.'

After a long interval came the laconic :

'Have passed *Flor* to partner for necessary action.'

Thereafter the bulletins read as under:

Bulletin 4

'Partner still in action, but respiration and pulse very weak.'

Bulletin 5

'Partner *in extremis*. Head clerk volunteering.'

Bulletin 6

'Head clerk passed out. Head accountant now carrying the torch. Says fine.'

Bulletin 7

'Second clerk at grips. Strong smell of burning during his big scene traced to *La Flor's* band. Band (apparently made of scarlet and gilt cardboard) removed with aid of office scissors and a chisel.'

Bulletin 8

'Junior accountant resumes after lunch interval.'

Bulletin 9

'Junior accountant caught in slips. Third clerk now taking guard.'

Bulletin 10

'Third clerk in play. Fire Brigade sent away for second time. End of *La Flor* now in sight.'

Bulletin 11

'Third clerk carried out suffering from smoker's heart, partial asphyxiation, and lockjaw. Short

innings by office-boy. Commissionaire now making fine stand.'

Bulletin 12

'Commissionaire (ex-company sergeant-major with sixteen years' service) still holding out nobly.'

Bulletin 13

'Commissionaire fails at last inch and a half. Commissionaire from next door (ex-*regimental* sergeant-major with *twenty-three* years' service) emphatically refuses. *La Flor* therefore considered unsmokable. Officially classed as a butt and thrown into mud of gutter.'

Bulletin 14. (*Supplementary*)

'Passing tramp (ex *able seaman* with *two* years' service) picked up *La Flor* and finished with every appearance of enjoyment, last centimetre being consumed in clay pipe. Outlook for continued British naval supremacy considered hopeful.'

XI. THE WITCH OF DUCKING

WHO says witchcraft is dead? I certainly don't, and no more does Percival. In fact, we are both still feeling decidedly apprehensive.

It happened last summer when we were on a walking tour in Sussex. Late one evening we arrived at a village called Ducking and entered the small and only inn to get a lodging for the night. In a dark passage a female figure materialized, proclaiming herself the proprietress, and we asked for a bed—before we saw her clearly. We then wished we hadn't committed ourselves, for we perceived immediately that we had encountered a Witch.

There are not, I suppose, many witches in England now, but this was certainly one. She had grey hair hanging round her face like wisps of damp sea-weed, two eyes with intersecting lines of fire like a pair of support-line machine-guns, four small tumuli on the left cheek, some long hairs on the chin, and the finest iron-grey moustache I have seen outside of a cavalry regiment. In short, she was perfect. A hundred years ago she would have been burnt at the stake on sight. Of course, had we not realized she was a witch we might have been suspicious of the odour of gin which hung about her. As it was, however, we knew it was simply evil spirits and nervously drew closer together, trying to guess which one of us she was looking at.

She agreed to give us supper and bed and departed, remarking in sinister fashion that she would get a room *ready*—or, as Percival whispered to me with a forced laugh, make sure that the oubliette's spring was working properly.

A quarter of an hour later she reappeared in the sitting-room suddenly and silently with one plate and a large brass lamp, put them on the table, and vanished again. We examined the plate gingerly. It seemed an ordinary plate, but one never knew; it might have a powerful spell all over it. We then tried to light the lamp for some time, but without success. All that happened was a loud, magical, popping sound in its internals. In the middle of this the Witch re-entered, gazed fixedly at Percival (or it may have been the ceiling), and went out.

Percival looked at me apprehensively and instantly felt himself to see that his head had not been turned back to front. He then asked me to make certain that he was not developing a hunched back.

While I was doing so, the Witch lumbered in once more with more plates, asked whether we'd like some beer, and remarked, *à propos* of drinking and bars, that she was not a common woman. We both agreed heartily. We felt she was very uncommon indeed. In fact, I remembered uneasily that I had seen a broomstick in the umbrella-stand and began to wonder if she possessed a black tom-cat.

Five minutes later, heralded by a peal of hideous laughter outside the door, the Witch was again in

our midst, this time bearing some cold ham and beer. The beer was in ordinary mugs, not as I expected in skull drinking-cups.

Percival and I watched her fearfully, our backs to a wall, while she laid the table and chatted to us. It was an uncanny conversation. Twice she said in a significant manner she hoped we'd be *comfortable* in her inn, and once she remarked with a knowing and satisfied chuckle that previous visitors to her inn were *quite* comfortable. As she appeared to look out of the window at this, I glanced out too and saw in a yard a collection of pigs, cows, goats, and what-not. I turned pale and whispered 'Circe' to Percival, who turned even paler, crossed his fingers, and asked for light.

'And what time would you like your breakfast?' asked the Witch, lighting the lamp apparently by raising a gnarled hand up and down above it three times.

We timidly replied: 'Eight-thirty.'

This caused her much ominous amusement. She repeated with an eerie chuckle: 'Oh, you'd *like* your breakfast at eight-thirty, would you?' and went out still in malicious enjoyment of her ghastly joke.

We shivered. She could not have expressed herself more plainly. Every intonation said: 'If you think you'll be in a shape to have breakfast at eight-thirty to-morrow . . .'

We did not have much appetite, but Percival recited an exorcism three times backwards, and, despite eldritch laughter from the Witch's kitchen,

felt better. He said, dash it, he'd have some more beer, and rang a handbell. Nothing happened save that a large black tom-cat appeared at the end of the room. It *may* have been asleep under a chair, but personally I am to this moment prepared to swear that no cat was in the room when we arrived, and none had come in since. Speechless with terror, I pointed it out to Percival, but as he peered forward over the table it ran underneath before he could see it. We had a long argument as to whether it existed or not, but when I gathered my courage and searched it wasn't there. Reduced to a sort of trembling terror, Percival rang the bell again. I was expecting at least a basilisk to come down the chimney this time, but all that happened was that an old old gnome-like man appeared and eventually brought us beer. We debated for some while whether he was a victim or a warlock in partnership, and decided on the latter.

In the middle of our discussion the Witch re-materialized, took away our plates, and asked with a diabolical interest if we were *still* all right and how we had enjoyed it. Up to then we had at least enjoyed the beer fairly well, but now we didn't think we had.

We stammered that we hadn't been giving our minds to it. The word 'give' apparently started a train of thought, for she remarked solemnly: 'To lend a little, spend a little, but best of all to *give*. I love to give myself, don't you?' She then smiled a supernatural smile, fixed us each with an opposite eye, and added: 'Ah, time will

show! Do you know what I mean? You know what I mean? . . . Ah, you don't know what I mean. But *I* know what I mean.' Her demoniacal chuckle once more resounded in the passage outside as she retired.

Percival and I gazed uncomfortably at one another, drank about a pint of beer, and gazed again. Then we burst into a roar of uneasy laughter, in the middle of which the Witch popped her head in and chanted:

'It is good to sparkle while you're young!' Then, extending a skinny claw at us in malediction, she added: 'So sparkle ere you die!' and withdrew once more.

We crossed ourselves and clutched one another in terror, which became a veritable panic as the clock, which had stood steadily at a quarter to nine ever since our arrival, suddenly struck twelve in sonorous tones.

We struggled in blind terror to our bedroom, where we drew pentagrams and circles round the room and recited paragraphs of the Army Act from the middle outwards. Despite this, just as Percival pulled the bedclothes over his head, his two candles—good long ones, like those round a bier—suddenly flickered and went out. . . .

We just lay in the dark and prayed. . . .

Next morning we rose early, left money, and hurried on our way, having struck the doorpost with red chalk in the sign of a cross. Two villagers who saw us emerge seemed surprised and incredulous.

This is all perfectly true.

To this day I sometimes gaze apprehensively into my glass expecting the malign power of the Witch of Ducking to reach out from her Sussex village and set my head under my left arm or turn me into a seven-toed sheep. For who dares say witchcraft is dead ?

XII. THE PAPER-CHASE

NOT only does paper-chasing provide much healthy exercise, but it promotes the circulation both of the blood and small portions of the daily Press. Indeed, Percival and I both consider it a fine sport which should become increasingly popular among all classes. All the same, we were not quite prepared for my elderly Aunt Araminta (with whom we were staying last week) to announce unexpectedly at breakfast that she was taking part in a village paper-chase that afternoon.

For the moment we had incredible visions of Aunt Araminta lavishly sprinkling this England with fragments of Mr. James Douglas's 'Purer Sunday Murders' campaign, as she doubled, Charley's Aunt-wise, across the landscape; till she added: 'I'm collecting the money, you know. A shilling for each entry. It's for the Church Debt Fund.'

We understood. The Church is solidly behind everything that goes on in Aunt Araminta's village. The Vicar's fiscal policy is really responsible, because whenever he wants to make some alterations which he thinks the parish won't sanction, he goes and does it on his own with borrowed capital and then launches a passionate appeal to the large hearts of the village to Get the Church out of Debt. The result is that alert brains like Aunt Araminta's are eternally devising

new methods of pocket-appeal, while the parish magazine resembles these financial publications subsidized by bucket-shops.

'Who are to be the hares?' we asked at last, feeling, however, that we could guess the answer to that one.

We were right. Apparently we were to be, together with Miss Golightly and young Mrs. Skinner, 'two such charming girls'. We bowed to the inevitable and, like hares for the slaughter, meekly went to look out suitable kit.

The start was inauspicious. The Vicar's wife having indicated the Vicarage drive as the meeting-place for the field, we had not anticipated her sudden discovery that the drawing-room was after all *so* much warmer. I mean, the major portion of the field was church-going but non-running—a well-dressed assemblage of devout and elderly souls getting their bob's worth of social gathering and charitable feeling—while even the local Youth-and-Beauty's idea of paper-chasing costume was either tweed skirts and mackintoshes or plus-fours, walking-sticks, and large furry gloves; whereas Percival and I, in our zeal to uphold the honour of London running, wore only thin zephyrs and running shorts. And, believe me, these hardly look the thing in a drawing-room conversazione presided over by a vicar's wife.

We caused a terrific sensation when we first entered, which was but heightened by Percival's bringing in with him a small mat from the hall on one of his spiked running-shoes. After a short period of chilly ostracism we were hurriedly

introduced to our fellow-hares, blushing vividly, and not till we had got outside and donned large sacks of paper torn up by a mass *corvée* of the Sunday School Mixed Infants did we feel more in the picture.

Miss Golightly, who was a very pretty girl and carried a vanity case, had, I should say, been chosen for her part merely because she looked fast. Mrs. Skinner, on the other hand, was a fat young woman, and had obviously been selected by the Vicar's wife to act as official chaperon to the hares —an old custom now fast dying out in the more fashionable paper-chasing circles. Amid cheers we set off down the main road at an impressive lope. Behind us the pack, ranging from that wily old hound Admiral Bettworthy with his ear-trumpet, down to little Cyril, aged eight, who ought still to have been out at walk, toed up for an early start.

Half a mile down the road we turned off into a field. Here Miss Golightly wanted to stop and rest ; and Mrs. Skinner, who was by no means a touring model, had trouble with the stile. By the time we had reached the next field Percival, poor mutt, falling for a request for assistance at the hedge, had been vamped into carrying the Golightly bag of paper. I, harder of heart, skilfully levered the Skinner through the brambles and followed without harm to myself in the broad passage thus swathed.

We did two more fields and then a halt was called while Miss Golightly executed running repairs to her hair, which was positively blowing

into her eyes, my dear, I mean it actually was. When we resumed, I had Mrs. Skinner's bag of paper, which she cleverly forgot to pick up from the ground where she had put it to sit upon. Despite the rest, we stopped again at the next gate, ostensibly to pick a spray of berries, actually to rest again.

It was after the fifth field and the sixth rest that as a jolly party of hares we began to go all to pieces. For some while Percival and I managed to keep in touch with the female branch by laying a trail round three sides of each field while the others walked across the fourth. Eventually they completely disappeared, apparently sunk with all hands, in a swampy patch of wood. For the honour of London, Percival and I continued alone.

We laid a good trail that day, though I say it myself. We ran alongside muddy lanes and threw paper over the hedge into the mire ; we climbed up hills into the wind and let the trail blow down deep ravines ; we laid a false line into a field occupied by a bull—which nearly cost me Percival. And all the while we ran like Olympic champions.

Half a mile from home we looked round and to our surprise saw a dozen hounds incredibly two hundred yards behind us. . . .

I don't know what the best world time for the last half mile of a hard run is, but if you take away from the answer the number you first thought of you will get somewhere near *our* time for that half mile. It was not till a quarter of an

hour after our collapse in the Vicarage rhododendrons that we got any faculties back at all, and then we discovered several things.

First, that no single hound had been clever enough to pick up the trail farther than the point where we had left the main road. Second, that, with the exception of three engaged couples who had continued an imaginary trail up the main road to the cinema in the neighbouring town, everybody had after ten minutes' search given up the hunt and was now finishing tea in the Vicarage drawing-room. Thirdly, that the dozen we saw so hot upon our trail, and who had so nearly given us heart disease, were a party which, after returning and getting warm at the Vicarage fire, had been sent out into the fields nearby to gather foliage to decorate the village hall; and, it transpired later, had not even then observed us. And lastly, that the two female hares had been back half an hour already, having availed themselves of the local bus service, and were being heavily congratulated on their evident superiority to mere male runners from London.

The next paper-chase Percival and I take part in will have to be somewhere out in the great open spaces, where men are men and hares are hares and the best are *not* like the worst.

OUR YACHT AGAIN

I. WE GET AWAY

LAST summer Percival and I again signed on on the yacht *Merry Widow*. If you remember, I told you in another book about some of our previous year's yachting experiences on the Norfolk Broads—which, by the way, we found not nearly broad enough for our purposes—and the following year history repeated itself. Captain Percival took on Apple as crew, and once again we found ourselves afloat—or, rather, speaking less conventionally and with more truth, aground, for almost immediately we miscalculated the width of the River Yare.

But we felt we were lucky to be on board at all, for our start was not marked by superlative yachtsmanship.

We arrived on the quay-side at about four p.m. direct from London in spats and bowler hats, dived below—which is bad for the best bowler hats—and reappeared a short while later in our yachting kit. Captain Percival wore grey flannel trousers and a yachting cap with a tennis shirt *motif* in between, and Crew Apple was clad chiefly in a sweater and shorts, the effect of which was rather spoilt by his having forgotten to take off his spats.

'Ready!' cries Captain Percival, having loaded

in the beer and other provender, till the yacht is as low in the water as a cargo wherry.

'Ready—aye, ready,' responds Crew Apple smartly.

'Well, weigh the anchor!'

Crew Apple does so and reports that it weighs rather a lot; so Captain Percival has to help him. Together they haul up the anchor, a boot, two pineapple tins (without pineapple), an elliptical motor tyre, a firkin of river weed, and some of the foundations of the quay. Crew Apple spends a happy half-hour sorting out the debris and dutifully putting aside those items which he thinks will come in handy for his Aunt Araminta's jumble sale.

'Now the sails!' commands Percival, who has meanwhile been trying to arrange the stores on deck.

'Aye, aye, sir,' responds Crew Apple again and hauls vigorously on various ropes. Owing to Percival's thoughtless arrangement of the stores on top of the sails nearly everything on board the yacht at once appears to be drawn up skyward. Most of it returns when half-way up—just as Percival is gazing anxiously aloft to see if it does. Then the sails fill out, the boom swings round, dispersing the quay-side onlookers, and *The Merry Widow*, only secured now by an overlooked cable, shows a disposition to be off.

'Cast off!' bellows Percival, hauling in the sheet and clutching the tiller.

'Aye, aye, sir,' shrieks Apple, leaping ashore and smartly untying the cable of some one else's

dinghy made fast to the same post. The dinghy drifts off downstream to the accompaniment of nautical blasphemy from the owner. Nothing, of course, happens to the *Merry Widow*, so that Crew Apple's frantic return leap appears unnecessarily hurried.

Some one from the safe vantage of a boat-house —for the boom is still flailing the quay—points out the error, and Crew Apple is sent ashore again. This time he unties the *Merry Widow* correctly, but is so busy watching the rest of the yachtage to see which of it, if any, drifts off as well, that when he prepares to return the *Merry Widow* has departed under the breeze and is now ashore on the far bank. Percival is trying to push her off with a long quant-pole in order to get back to his beloved crew, but nothing is moving –except the boom, which is striking him playful blows on the grey-flannel trousers.

Crew Apple, therefore, confronted with much the same problems as Mohammed, decides he must go to the *Merry Widow*, and so borrows a dinghy and rows across. As he nears his goal, Percival, quite preoccupied with the quant, frees the *Merry Widow* from the mud by a superhuman effort, gets her head round, and tacks madly back again to the quay, calling aloud on Apple to jump. His annoyance at not finding Apple where he last left him on the quay is only equalled by Apple's annoyance at not finding the *Merry Widow* where he last saw her on the bank.

They re-cross twice more, and at last meet in mid-stream—a fortunate encounter, largely due to

the fact that Apple, the true sailor, rows backwards. Crew Apple, however, having embarked on the back of his neck with his legs in the water, has stupidly forgotten to bring the dinghy painter with him ; so that the yacht sails away leaving two dinghies belonging to total strangers adrift in mid-stream.

A poor beginning. But we are at least off. Captain Percival's face under his yachting cap takes on a set expression, due partly to trying to steer and partly to trying not to hear what people on the bank are saying, and Crew Apple goes below to put on dry clothes.

We sail hard for five minutes, then :

' Watch below ! ' roars Percival, who is out to do the thing on proper nautical lines.

Apple, in the middle of changing his trousers, ducks apprehensively from force of habit, and then says plaintively : ' Where ? '

' All hands wanted on deck ! ' shrieks Percival.

' Aye, aye ! ' yells Apple, bustling, though at the moment all his hands are wanted to hold up his trousers.

' Tumble up there ! '

There is a small step between the *Merry Widow's* cabin and the well. Crew Apple does tumble up. He sits in the well holding his knee with one hand and his trousers up with the other, while Percival tells him to belay, to avast, and to go forrard and con ship.

Apple ties his bags up with a spare end of rope and makes a determined attempt to go forrard. But the wind has become suddenly and unac-

countably strong, and he can get no farther forward than amidships, though he leans hard against the gale and strains every nerve. At last he unties from round his waist the aft mooring cable with which he has inadvertently secured his trousers and then finds he can quite easily get right up to the sharp end.

'Land on starboard bow!' announces Apple, after consideration.

Captain Percival swings the tiller over and the *Merry Widow* at once runs eight feet inland, two feet above Mean Sea Level, and several feet above Dead Sea Level. Crew Apple, from a sitting position in some wet rushes, explains at some length that he is sorry, that he had always understood from a boy that the starboard was the left side, and that anyway he has apologized and one cannot say fairer than that.

After several unsuccessful attempts to shove off, the Captain gave up and began to calculate heights of tides. It appeared that, ordinary tides not being high enough to float the yacht off, the *Merry Widow* was there till the next bore, *eiger*, or *mascaret* came up the river. The only alternative was to lighten ship. We made a beginning on this by getting off the yacht ourselves and walking back fifty yards along the bank to where we started from in order to hire a motor tow-boat and buy Apple more trousers.

The owners of the two derelict dinghies were quite pleased to see us. There was a lot they still want to say.

II. WE GO SHRIMPING

STRICTLY speaking, this is not about our yacht at all. It is about the fishing boat of a man Captain Percival met when he was just glancing into the bar of the 'Cat and Bloater' at Yarmouth to get the right time. Luckily his watch was fast and there were still ten minutes to go, so he got into conversation with one Mr. Liffin, a Yarmouth fisherman. Crew Apple was not present at the interview. He had been left behind on the *Merry Widow* (which had been pulled off the mud the day before and was now tied firmly to Yarmouth), and had instructions to remove from the outside of the yacht the recently acquired weeds, mud, rushes, moor-hens' nests, and other little minutiae which give away the unskilled yachtsman to the practised eye.

Captain Percival, having successfully got the right time, came back to the *Merry Widow* with Mr. Liffin. Mr. Liffin, it appeared, had invited us both to come out shrimping with him next morning. When we had accepted he said he would be round for us about two a.m., and departed before we could properly explain *our* reading of the word 'morning'.

Two a.m. is the kind of time that you have to wait up for; it is not the kind of time to get up for. At least, if you do, you don't—if you see what I mean. We waited up for it, and found it quite easily.

By three a.m. we were sailing down the estuary which runs through Yarmouth. We were in Mr. Liffin's boat which had two red sails, an auxiliary motor, several nets, and a smell of last week's catch, so strong that I wonder Mr. Liffin had not thought of using it instead of the auxiliary motor. It was still quite dark and Percival was asleep against the mast. I, who, when embarking, had trodden on a derelict shrimp from the day before yesterday, was sitting gingerly on a nice soft fishing-net. Mr. Liffin and his son Chris were exchanging remarks in broad Norfolk about the coming day's weather.

We steamed on down the estuary through night-clad Yarmouth. Far overhead an ominous wind blew the smell of Yarmouth bloaters from bank to bank. After a while we reached the open sea. The motor was shut off and the wind, leaving the Yarmouth smell, came down lower and played with ours instead. The sails filled with the morning breeze. The boat sped out towards the rising sun. (Blank verse! *I* made it.)

Chris Liffin then disappeared into a hole up in the bows and began to smoke what I thought was a particularly vile brand of fisherman's tobacco, till I discovered he was merely lighting a stove for breakfast. Anyhow, it woke Percival up, and he began sleepy reminiscences of dawns he had seen in either Picardy or Piccadilly—I couldn't quite make out which.

I went and watched Chris preparing breakfast. He had a method simple and yet effective. In a kettle he boiled ready-made cocoa previously

stirred up with a finger. From a big toffee-tin he took five very flat, very repulsive, bloaters. These he first held fan-wise in front of the fire to warm them up a bit. They looked just like a poker hand. Indeed, there was one with such a battered expression and evil leer that I was positive it was the joker; certainly it looked as though it had exercised the joker's prerogative of being anything one liked. Then one by one Chris played his hand straight into the fire. When each bloater caught light, he extracted it by the tail and blew it out; when he had blown it out it was 'done'. It seemed to solve the time problem quite satisfactorily. I must mention this tip to the next *chef* I meet. Old Liffin, at the tiller, subsequently ate with relish. I personally wasn't hungry. Percival had just dropped off to sleep again.

When we had reached farther out into the vasty deep—somewhere off Denmark it seemed to me—Liffin and his son threw their nets overboard and we dragged them along the bottom of the sea, no doubt seriously discommoding the shrimps all pursuing their normal avocations some full fathom five and not expecting any disturbance so early. Percival was not very interested; he had been unfortunately sleeping on rather an important rope where the nets went over. The result had been almost as good as one of the *Merry Widow's* gybes.

After a while we hauled the nets up again. For excitement and novelty it was rather like opening one's Christmas stocking. Masses of shrimps with which were mingled unknown marine fauna and

flora poured into a basket, flapped about a bit, and then began to change colour. I, however, was not very interested in all this, nor in the subsequent netfuls; I was too busy changing colour myself. Percival had just dropped off again.

We did this for two or three hours—actually it seemed like two or three days—and then set a homeward course with our baskets full. By then I was taking an interest once more, and began a little song about 'fifteen hundred quintal', till several shrimps jumped overboard and Liffin asked me to stop. We had caught over ten pecks, or, as Liffin told us, about one hundred and sixty pints. Percival woke up abruptly at this, but on learning that it was only shrimps seemed a bit shocked. We started to help Liffin and Chris sort out the shrimps from the goats.

There were some very peculiar things besides shrimps in those baskets we were sorting. Percival, plunging his hand in, sorted out a sea-urchin almost immediately, but failed to see the humour of it. There were also soles and dabs and hard-heads and cuttle-fish, and a ray. I got a starfish on my third dip and wore it like a Wild West film sheriff on my lapel for some while, till it got tired. Then Percival got embroiled with a small fish which he attempted three times to throw over-board and each time found still adhering to his fingers. After that I had a try, with no better success. When the Liffins had enjoyed the joke for some while they explained it was a 'sucker', a fish which has on its under side a thing like a suction cup for securing itself to everything it

fancies, such as rocks or crabs or Percival's hand. There were lots of these among the shrimps, and Percival at last got hold of a big one by the tail and used it to pick up the others with. I stuck mine as I found them, unobserved, on Percival's back, where they stayed quite happily and made him look like a 'pearly' king.

This occupied us all the way back to Yarmouth. Mr. Liffin seemed pleased when we parted, gave us a peculiar-looking flat fish with a white underneath, for our breakfast, and asked us how we would like to do that for a living. Percival, removing a 'sucker' from his left elbow, said he wouldn't mind but that he found it tiring work. May he be forgiven!

We spent a long while wondering how to cook the big flat fish Liffin had given us. We could make no impression on it. I believe it was a sole —a rubber sole, I should say. Eventually we wrote a message of despair on its white underneath and cast it overboard in favour of bacon and eggs.

For a long while we found 'suckers' all over the *Merry Widow*, and they came in very handy. In fact, one held down this paper for me as I wrote.

III. WE TAKE PART IN A GALE

WE experienced a gale. Of course, we did not know it was a gale at the time, or we should never have ventured out in it; because every one used to tell us gales on the Broads were so dangerous and we oughtn't to attempt to take part in them. Indeed, we had never experienced a gale in the *Merry Widow* before. Generally the wind has been of such poor quality that time and time again Captain Percival has had to detail Crew Apple to go forward with the ship's bellows and keep the jib-sail filled.

But this time we had in one morning enough wind to last our yacht for a year, or to drive a windmill for five and a half weeks, or to keep a Communist in speeches for three days. We still raise our voices and hold on our hair, when we think of it, and for days we had a permanent twist from sitting perpetually on a slope.

We started in a chilly dawn from a place called Reedham. It was not raining actually, because it was blowing too hard and all the rain must have been quite horizontal several hundred feet up. We never so much as thought at the time that it might be a gale; all we noticed was that there was a good wind and that it seemed to be going in our direction.

We decided after consultation to have a reef in the mainsail, and then we decided to have two reefs in the mainsail, and then we raised it to three,

and finally, when we discovered there weren't enough holes in the sail to take in four reefs and Crew Apple had been stopped from making them with his pocket-knife, we decided not to have a mainsail at all, but to sail on the jib alone.

People in pyjamas were discreetly watching us from windows as we set to work. One or two appeared to shout good-bye and crossed themselves. Branches of trees blown down in the night were lying on the quay-side ; the flagstaff outside the public-house was bent like a bow. We waved, hoisted the jib—and both anchor cables parted with loud reports.

When Percival was coherent once more and I had pulled in what was left of the cables, Reedham was a smudge on the horizon behind us. We could just make out that the ' Barclington Beer ' flag on the public-house flagstaff was at half mast ; but this may have been the wind. Or, perhaps, on second thoughts, merely commercial candour. The beer at that place never was properly ' up '.

We ploughed onward, waves breaking nastily over the bows and over Crew Apple. The wind, even though it came from behind, was very strong. It whistled through the ropes. It whistled through Crew Apple. It blew Captain Percival's hat off into the water, but luckily we didn't have to stop for it. We just fished it on board, when we caught up with it five minutes later. The reeds were bent flat on either side. The burgee blew off the mast, and streamed out far ahead of us. An anchor insecurely fastened, was blown from the deck and hit a grazing ox on the starboard

bow—I should rather say, in a field on the starboard bow.

After about four miles or ten minutes the river took a very sharp turn. All unsuspecting, we rounded the corner and the wind suddenly blew almost directly at us. We stopped dead and then began to go backwards. Captain Percival did things with the sails; we rapidly approached a muddy bank, and Crew Apple, the man of the moment, seized the sixteen-foot quant-pole and ran aft to fend her off.

We fetched up on the bank with a jerk. As far as the quant-pole was visible it was but a ten-foot one. Crew Apple could not stir it; it might have been driven in with a pile-driver. The wind caught our 'Secundus' stove and blew it far inland.

Percival rearranged the sails, altered the position of the tiller, and we suddenly leapt off with terrific velocity. The quant-pole came out as easily as the stick out of a cocktail cherry; we foamed across the river, heeling over at an incredible angle, the mast nearly parallel with the water. We hit the other bank, rebounded, and did it again.

We cheered. We were tacking. We actually made distance. The wind continued to whistle through the ropes and through Crew Apple.

We did a good bit of this, Crew Apple alternately sitting on the starboard keel and the port keel of the *Merry Widow*, among the barnacles and limpets and sea-weed. Then the river turned again and the wind abruptly came from the side, and blew Crew Apple's hat straight into a river-side windmill. We thought at first it was a

derelict windmill without sails, but when we looked closer we saw that the sails were there really, only going round so fast we couldn't see them—like an aeroplane propeller. I hope you believe this.

After a while we emerged on an open stretch of water near Yarmouth. Mountainous waves were breaking in every direction. Far ahead lay Yarmouth wrapped in rain and mist; far below lay Apple wrapped in a mackintosh, baling water out of his bunk into Percival's. The wind came behind us again and we were off in a cloud of spray, flying cordage, branches of trees, and what not.

We did the course—four miles—in record time. A lot of fish were blown over us, and a small chicken from a farm away to the north-west. Then we observed the bridges of Yarmouth quite close. The time had come to tie up and signal for a tow through to the safety of the Yacht Station.

There were some posts near the shore for tying up, and Percival said he would come up quite close to these while Crew Apple, who had battled up to the sharp end, threw a rope over one of them.

We came up quite close to the first post. It whizzed past like a main-line telegraph pole before Apple could even see it. We came up quite close to the next one—quite close enough. Apple threw his loop of rope, had the sensation of holding a red-hot poker for a minute and we were gone. So were the rope and the post.

Percival, desperate because we were rapidly

approaching the bridges, tried another way. He brought the yacht up head to wind, while Crew Apple lowered the sail. Several things at once happened. The sail was blown into the water; the boat lost all its way and was blown backward on to the posts and the shore, and Crew Apple was blown on to land. Marsh-land.

There we waited, immobilized, till motor-boats came and helped us. Percival could not move the rudder and Apple could not move his feet or seat.

They said reproachfully at Yarmouth: 'You didn't ought to have come out in a gale.'

We said we wished some one had told us it *was* a gale and of course we wouldn't. But *we* thought it was only wind.

IV. WE USE THE NEW CUT

THE New Cut is a straight canal over two miles long. The idea of it is to enable yachts to sail from the Yare into the Waveney or vice versa, without having to go right down to the mouth of one, practically out into the sea, and back again up the other. Well, Percival and I used the New Cut during our trip. For a long time after we were a bit flustered and dishevelled. We used nearly all of it.

We began by being in the Waveney. We were, after our gale experiences, tied up to what an inhabitant assured us was a practically immovable village on the river bank. We were waiting for the tide to turn, because the wind was already against us, and Percival, who had been looking things up in the book, had discovered that the New Cut was almost impassable against both wind *and* tide, being too narrow to allow even ordinary tacking, let alone the big stitches *we* usually take. Why there should be any tide at all in a canal I couldn't understand, but Percival said the book said there was. Percival yachts a good deal by book.

At two p.m., after four hours' waiting, Percival suddenly said the book said the tide had turned and so we left our moorings. A man in another yacht—quite a novice—asked us in surprised fashion, as we passed, if we were going up the New Cut. Percival cried : ' Why, yes, old man ! ' and waved a friendly tiller at him. At which we

promptly ran him down. Since he was a novice, he apologized, and Percival told him severely he really must both belay and avast on occasions like that. Then we sailed superciliously into the mouth of the New Cut, and were immediately swept out again by a strong and hostile tide.

When this had happened three times, I asked Percival if he was quite certain about the tide having turned at two p.m. I felt he might have got the wrong time, or the wrong river, or even the wrong book. Percival told me he was not a fool, and read it out again. He was quite right: the tide *had* turned at two p.m. But for some unearthly reason the poor fish Percival had seen fit to assume that originally it had been *against* us; whereas during all the hours we had so patiently waited it had really been going our way. And now of course it wasn't.

I was very nice to him about it, even though I still didn't see why there should be any tide one way or the other. I merely said it was a pity the author of the book hadn't made his meaning quite clear for *all* types of reader.

So we had another attempt. This time knowing what the tide was doing, we managed actually to sail, though very close to the wind and rather too close to the bank. We got on famously. We made a yard a minute. The canal looked very long and straight. To pass the time I worked out that if we were lucky enough to maintain our present rate we should do the New Cut by two-fifteen a.m. on the third morning—speaking roughly, of course.

Then we came to a bridge. It took five men half an hour and three ropes to get us through, after which our rate slowed down a little. So we decided to try and tack. At first we made quite four yards every tack, but unfortunately we made them in the wrong direction, and when finally we ran into both banks practically at once we gave it up. There was only one thing left—to tow; for the humorist who originally built the New Cut provided a tow-path alongside it as a guide to the joke.

Captain Percival got out and towed first, while Crew Apple handled the tiller. We kept the sails up to get what help we could from the wind. Encouraged by Crew Apple with huntin', fishin', and shootin' cries, Captain Percival towed very well for half an hour. Then we stopped because of a post and notice on the bank about trespassing. We didn't stop in order to read it; we stopped because we got the tow-rope twisted round it.

Our next halt was for a bush. Crew Apple having incautiously steered too near the bank, the bush—a fine healthy one—was uprooted by the boom and came on board into the well all over Crew Apple. Apple, who was not used to steering in forests, promptly ran bang into the side. This stopped both the yacht and Percival practically simultaneously. The subsequent conversation between Percival, who had sat down very abruptly ashore, and Apple, peering coyly through the leaves on board, was not marred by any insincere politeness. The net result was that Percival

accused Apple of leaving all the towing to him and suggested that he should get out and do some for a change.

Crew Apple crawled out of his primeval jungle fastnesses, like some Eoanthropus or Piltdown Sub-man, and Percival, after a scathing remark about house-boats and window-boxes took his place in the thicket, whence he was heard later asking in a muffled and querulous voice which branch Crew Apple had been steering with.

Apple towed manfully with the rope tied round him. Apple passed people on the bank and the people on the bank passed remarks at Apple. Apple met a cow; the cow met Apple. The cow met the rope, got both entangled and frightened, and towed the *Merry Widow* and Apple and all for half a mile before it disengaged—luckily in the right direction. Even the angry Percival (whose vision of the bank was still obscured by thick foliage about him) was constrained to commend Crew Apple for some remarkably fast towing.

The end of the New Cut came in sight, and then a funny thing happened. Perhaps it was due to some slight change in the wind, but the *Merry Widow* slowly began to sail instead of being towed. Since the tow-rope, though now hanging slack, had yet to be pulled through the canal-side rushes, Crew Apple did not notice any vast change, while Captain Percival still could not see for leaves except dead ahead.

So gradually, all unsuspected by Captain and crew, the *Merry Widow* overtook the toiling Apple, the tow-rope dragging in a vast swathing

loop between them. They went like this for some while—a pretty sight.

Then another notice about trespassing cropped up and took the loop of the tow-rope. For some while Apple and the *Merry Widow* strained immovable on either side. Then the yacht, having the wind while Apple had only Apple, began to win. Slowly at first, but with increasing speed, the bewildered Crew Apple was pulled backwards as the *Merry Widow* under the freshening wind went forward. At the end Apple, doing about twelve miles an hour backwards, rounded the post like a flash, and did twelve miles an hour forwards. Finally he was pulled into the water. Percival, immersed in arboretum, did not notice.

The *Merry Widow* reached the end of the New Cut a quarter of an hour later, when Percival discovered his crew's absence and hauled him in from astern.

What still rankles in the crew's mind is that his captain had the impudence to accuse Apple again of leaving all the towing to him.

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